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THE WORKS OF

GEORGE MEREDITH

ONE OF OUR CONQUERORS

II

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THE WORKS OF
GEORGE MEREDITH

VOLUME XX

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VOLUME

II

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CONTENTS

		Page
XXI.	Dartrey Fenellan, . . .	1
XXII.	Concerns the Intrusion of Jarniman, .	24
XXIII.	Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by Very Minor Causes, ...	35
XXIV.	Nesta's Engagement, . . .	53
XXV.	Nataly in Action, ...	72
XXVI.	In which we see a Conventional Gentleman endeavouring to examine a Spectre of himself, . .	87
XXVII.	Contains what is a Small Thing or a Great, as the Soul of the Chief Actor may decide, ...	95
XXVIII.	Mrs. Marsett, ...	105

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

XXIX. Shows one of the Shadows of the World crossing a Virgin's Mind, ... Page 122

XXX. The Burden upon Nesta, . . 131

XXXI. Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves, ... 146

XXXII. Shows how Temper may kindle Temper and an Indignant Woman get her Weapon, . . . 163

XXXIII. A Pair of Wooers, . . . 173

XXXIV. Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings, . . 189

XXXV. In which again we make Use of the Old Lamps for Lighting an Abysmal Darkness, . . . 202

XXXVI. Nesta and her Father, . . . 211

XXXVII. The Mother: The Daughter, . . 228

XXXVIII. Nataly, Nesta, and Dartrey Fenellan, 241

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

		Page
XXXIX.	A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett, ...	256
XL.	An Expiation, ...	275
XLI.	The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech, ...	289
XLII.	The Last, ...	306

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ONE OF OUR CONQUERORS

CHAPTER XXI

Dartrey Fenellan

Had Nataly and Nesta known who was outside helping Skepsey to play ball with the boys, they would not have worked through their share of the performance with so graceful a composure. Even Simeon Fenellan was unaware that his half-brother Dartrey had landed in England. Dartrey went first to Victor's office, where he found Skepsey packing the day's letters and circulars into the bag for the delivery of them at Lakelands. They sprang a chatter, and they missed the last of the express trains: which did not greatly signify, Skepsey said, 'as it was a Concert.' To hear his hero talk, was the music for him; and he richly enjoyed the pacing along the railway-platform.

Arrived on the grounds, they took opposite sides in a game of rounders, at that moment tossing heads or tails for innings. These boys were slovenly players, and were made unhappy by Skepsey's fussy instructions to them in smartness. They had a stupid way of feeding the stick, and they ran sprawling; it concerned Great Britain for them to learn how to use their legs. It was pitiful for the country to see how lumpish her younger children were. Dartrey knew his little man and laughed, after warning him that

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CHAPTER XXI Dartrey Fenellan

his English would want many lessons before they stomached the mixture of discipline and pleasure. So it appeared: the pride of the boys in themselves, their confidence, enjoyment of the game, were all gone; and all were speedily out but Skepsey; who ran for the rounder, with his coat off, sharp as a porpoise, and would have got it, he had it in his grasp, when, at the jump, just over the line of the goal, a clever fling, if ever was, caught him a crack on that part of the human frame where sound is best achieved. Then were these young lumps transformed to limber, lither, merry fellows. They rejoiced Skepsey's heart; they did everything better, ran and dodged and threw in a style to win the nod from the future official inspector of Games and Amusements of the common people; a deputy of the Government, proposed by Skepsey to his hero with a deferential eagerness. Dartrey clapped him on the shoulder, softly laughing.

'System—Mr. Durance is right—they *must* have system, if they are to appreciate a holiday,' Skepsey said; and he sent a wretched gaze around, at the justification of some of the lurid views of Mr. Durance, in signs of the holiday wasted;—impoverishing the country's manhood: in a small degree, it may be argued, but we ask, can the country afford it, while foreign nations are drilling their youth, teaching them to be ready to move in squads or masses, like the fist of a pugilist. Skepsey left it to his look to speak his thought. He saw an enemy in tobacco. The drowsiness of beer had stretched various hulks under trees. Ponderous cricket lumbered half-alive. Flabby fun knocked-up a yell. And it was rather vexatious to see girls dancing in good time to the band-music. One

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had a male-partner, who hopped his loutish burlesque of the thing he could not do.

CHAPTER XXI
Dartrey Fenellan

Apparently, too certainly, none but the girls had a notion of orderly muscular exercise. Of what use are girls! Girls have their one mission on earth; and let them be healthy by all means, for the sake of it; only, they should not seem to prove that Old England is better represented on the female side. Skepsey heard, with a nip of spite at his bosom, a small body of them singing in chorus as they walked in step, arm in arm, actually marched: and to the rearward, none of these girls heeding, there were the louts at their burlesque of jigs and fisticuffs! '*Cherry ripe*,' was the song.

'It's delightful to hear them!' said Dartrey.

Skepsey muttered jealously of their having been trained.

The song, which drew Dartrey Fenellan to the quick of an English home, planted him at the same time in Africa to hear it. Dewy on a parched forehead it fell, England the shedding heaven.

He fetched a deep breath, as of gratitude for vital refreshment. He had his thoughts upon the training of our English to be something besides the machinery of capitalists, and upon the country as a blessed mother instead of the most capricious of maudlin stepdames.

He flicked his leg with the stick he carried, said: 'Your master's the man to make a change among them, old friend!' and strolled along to a group surrounding two fellows who shammed a bout at single-stick. Vacuity in the attack on either side, contributed to the joint success of the defence. They paused

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CHAPTER XXI Dartrey Fenellan

under inspection; and Dartrey said: 'You're burning to give them a lesson, Skepsey.'

Skepsey had no objection to his hero's doing so, though at his personal cost.

The sticks were handed to them; the crowd increased; their rounders boys had spied them, and came trooping to the scene. Skepsey was directed to hit in earnest. His defensive attitude flashed, and he was at head and right and left leg, and giving point, recovering, thrusting madly, and again at shoulder and thigh, with bravos for a reward of a man meaning business; until a topper on his hat, a cut over the right thigh, and the stick in his middle-rib, told the spectators of a scientific adversary; and loudly now the gentleman was cheered. An undercurrent of warm feeling ran for the plucky little one at it hot again in spite of the strokes, and when he fetched his master a handsome thud across the shoulder, and the gentleman gave up and complimented him, Skepsey had applause.

He then begged his hero to put the previous couple in position, through a few of the opening movements. They were horribly sheepish at first. Meantime two boys had got hold of sticks, and both had gone to work in Skepsey's gallant style; and soon one was howling. He excused himself, because of the funny-bone, situated, in his case, higher than usual up the arm. And now the pair of men were giving and taking cuts to make a rhinoceros caper.

'Very well; begin that way; try what you can bear,' said Dartrey.

Skepsey watched them, in felicity for love of the fray, pained by the disregard of science.

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Comments on the pretty play, indicating a reminiscent acquaintance with it, and the capacity for critical observations, were started. Assaults, wonderful tricks of a slashing Life-Guardsman, one spectator had witnessed at an exhibition in a London hall. Boxing too. You may see displays of boxing still in places. How about a prize-fight?—With money on it?—Eh, but you don't expect men to stand up to be knocked into rump-steaks for nothing?—No, but it 's they there bets!—Right, and that 's a game gone to ruin along of outsiders.—But it always was and it always will be popular with Englishmen!

Great English names of young days, before the wintry shadow of the Law had blighted them, received their withered laurels. Emulous boys were in the heroic posture. Good! sparring does no hurt: Skepsey seized a likely lad, Dartrey another. Nature created the Ring for them. Now then, arms and head well up, chest hearty, shoulders down, out with the right fist, just below the level of the chin; out with the left fist farther, right out, except for that bit of curve; so, and draw it slightly back for wary—pussy at the spring. Firm you stand, feeling the muscles of both legs, left half a pace ahead, right planted, both stringy. None of your milk-pail looks, show us jaw, you bull-dogs. Now then, left from the shoulder, straight at right of head.—Good, and alacrity called on vigour in Skepsey's pupil; Dartrey's had the fist on his mouth before he could parry right arm up. 'Foul blow!' Dartrey cried. Skepsey vowed to the contrary. Dartrey reiterated his charge. Skepsey was a figure of negation, gesticulating and protesting. Dartrey appealed tempestuously to the Ring; Skepsey

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CHAPTER XXI Dartrey Fenellan

likewise, in a tone of injury. He addressed a remonstrance to Captain Dartrey.

'Hang your captain, sir! I call you a coward; come on,' said the resolute gentleman, already in ripe form for the attack. His blue eyes were like the springing sunrise over ridges of the seas; and Skepsey jumped to his meaning.

Boys and men were spectators of a real scientific set-to, a lovely show. They were half puzzled, it seemed so deadly. And the little one got in his blows at the gentleman, who had to be hopping. Only, the worse the gentleman caught it, the friendlier his countenance became. That was the wonder, and that gave them the key. But it was deliciously near to the real thing.

Dartrey and Skepsey shook hands.

'And now, you fellows, you're to know, that this is one of the champions; and you take your lesson from him and thank him,' Dartrey said, as he turned on his heel to strike and greet the flow from the house.

'Dartrey come!' Victor, Fenellan, Colney, had him by the hand in turn. Pure sweetness of suddenly awakened joy sat in Nataly's eyes as she swam to welcome him. Nesta moved a step, seemed hesitating, and she tripped forward. 'Dear Captain Dartrey!'

He did not say: 'But what a change in you!'

'*It is* blue-butterfly, all the same,' Nataly spoke to his look.

Victor hurriedly pronounced the formal introduction between the Hon. Dudley Sowerby and Captain Dartrey Fenellan. The bronze face and the milky bowed to one another ceremoniously; the latter faintly flushing.

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CHAPTER XXI
Dartrey Fenellan

'So here you are at last,' Victor said. 'You stay with us.'

'To-morrow or later, if you 'll have me. I go down to my people to-night.'

'But you stay in England now?' Nataly's voice wavered on the question.

'There 's a chance of my being off to Upper Burmah before the week 's ended.'

'Ah, dear, dear!' sighed Fenellan; 'and out of good comes evil!—as grandfather Deucalion exclaimed, when he gallantly handed up his dripping wife from the mud of the Deluge waters. Do you mean to be running and Jewing it on for ever, with only a nod for friends, Dart?'

'Lord, Simmy, what a sound of home there is in your old nonsense!' Dartrey said.

His eyes of strong dark blue colour and the foreign swarthiness of his brows and cheeks and neck mixed the familiar and the strange, in the sight of the women who knew him.

The bill-broker's fair-tressed young wife whispered of curiosity concerning him to Nataly. He dressed like a sailor, he stood like a soldier: and was he married? Yes, he was married.

Mrs. Blathenoy imagined a something in Mrs. Radnor's tone. She could account for it; not by the ordinary reading of the feminine in the feminine, but through a husband who professed to know secrets. She was young in years and experience, ten months wedded, disappointedly awakened, enlivened by the hour, kindled by a novel figure of man, fretful for a dash of imprudence. This Mrs. Radnor should be the one to second her very innocent turn for a galopade;

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CHAPTER XXI Dartrey Fenellan

her own position allowed of any little diverting jig or reel, or plunge in a bath—she required it, for the domestic Jacob Blathenoy was a dry chip: proved such, without a day's variation during the whole of the ten wedded months. Nataly gratified her spoken wish. Dartrey Fenellan bowed to the lady, and she withdrew him, seeing composedly that other and greater ladies had the wish ungratified. Their husbands were not so rich as hers, and their complexions would hardly have pleased the handsome brown-faced officer so well.

Banquet, equal to a blast of trumpet, was the detaining word for the multitude. It circulated, one knows not how. Eloquent as the whiffs to the sniffs (and nowhere is eloquence to match it, when the latter are sharpened from within to without), the word was very soon over the field. Mr. Carling may have helped; he had it from Fenellan; and he was among the principal groups, claiming or making acquaintances, as a lawyer should do. The Concert was complimentarily a topic: Durandarte divine!—did not everybody think so? Everybody did, in default of a term for overtopping it. Our language is poor at hyperbole; our voices are stronger. Gestures and heaven-sent eyeballs invoke to display the ineffable. Where was Durandarte now? Gone; already gone; off with the Luciani for evening engagements; he came simply to oblige his dear friend Mr. Radnor. Cheque fifty guineas: hardly more on both sides than an exchange of smiles. Ah, these merchant-princes! What of Mr. Radnor's amateur instrumentalists? Amateurs, they are not to be named: perfect musicians. Mr. Radnor is the perfection of a host. Yes, yes; Mrs.

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Radnor; Miss Radnor too: delicious voices; but what is it about Mr. Radnor so captivating! He is not quite English, yet he is not at all foreign. Is he very adventurous in business, as they say?

'Soundest head in the City of London,' Mr. Blathenoy remarked.

Sir Rodwell Blachington gave his nod.

The crowd interjected, half-sighing. We ought to be proud of such a man! Perhaps we are a trifle exaggerating, says its heart. But that we are wholly grateful to him, is a distinct conclusion. And he *may* be one of the great men of his time: he has a quite individual style of dress.

Lady Rodwell Blachington observed to Colney Durance: 'Mr. Radnor bids fair to become the idol of the English people.'

'If he can prove himself to be sufficiently the dupe of the English people,' said Colney.

'Idol—dupe?' interjected Sir Rodwell, and his eyebrows fixed at the perch of Colney's famous 'national interrogation' over vacancy of understanding, as if from the pull of a string. He had his audience with him; and the satirist had nothing but his inner gush of acids at sight of a planted barb.

Colney was asked to explain. He never explained. He performed a series of astonishing leaps, like the branchy baboon above the traveller's head in the tropical forest, and led them into the trap they assisted him to prepare for them. 'No humour, do you say? The English have no humour?' a nephew of Lady Blachington's inquired of him, with polite pugnacity, and was cordially assured, that 'he vindicated them.'

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CHAPTER XXI Dartrey Fenellan

'And *Altruistic!* another specimen of the modern coinage,' a classical Church dignitary, in grammarian disgust, remarked to a lady, as they passed.

Colney pricked-up his ears. It struck him that he might fish for suggestions in aid of the Grand Argument before the Elders of the Court of Japan. Dr. Wardan, whose recognition he could claim, stated to him, that the lady and he were enumerating words of a doubtfully legitimate quality now being inflicted upon the language.

'The slang from below is perhaps preferable?' said Colney.

'As little—less.'

'But a pirate-tongue, cut-off from its roots, must continue to practise piracy, surely, or else take reinforcements in slang, otherwise it is inexpressive of new ideas.'

'Possibly the new ideas are best expressed in slang.'

'If insular. They will consequently be incommunicable to foreigners. You would, then, have us be trading with tokens instead of a precious currency? Yet I cannot perceive the advantage of letting our ideas be clothed so racy of the obscener soil; considering the pretensions of the English language to become the universal. If we refuse additions from above, they force themselves on us from below.'

Dr. Wardan liked the frame of the observations, disliked the substance.

'One is to understand that the English language has these pretensions?' he said:—he minced in his manner, after the well-known mortar-board and tassel type; the mouthing of a petrifaction: clearly

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useless to the pleadings of the patriotic Dr. Bouthoin and his curate.

He gave no grip to Colney, who groaned at cheap Donnish sarcasm, and let him go, after dealing him a hard pellet or two in a cracker-covering.

There was Victor all over the field netting his ephemeræ! And he who feeds on them, to pay a price for their congratulations and flatteries, he is one of them himself!

Nesta came tripping from the Rev. Septimus Barmby. 'Dear Mr. Durance, where is Captain Dartrey?'

Mrs. Blathenoy had just conducted her husband through a crowd, for an introduction of him to Captain Dartrey. That was perceptible.

Dudley Sowerby followed Nesta closely: he struck across the path of the Rev. Septimus: again he had the hollow of her ear at disposal.

'Mr. Radnor was excellent. He does everything consummately: really, we are all sensible of it. I am. He must lead us in a symphony. These light "champagne overtures" of French composers, as Mr. Fenellan calls them, do not bring out his whole ability:—*Zampa*, *Le pré aux-clercs*, *Masaniello*, and the like.'

'Your duet together went well.'

'Thanks to you—to you. You kept us together.'

'Papa was the runaway or strain-the-leash, if there was one.'

'He is impetuous, he is so fervent. But, Miss Radnor, I could not be the runaway—with you . . . with you at the piano. Indeed, I . . . shall we stroll down? I love the lake.'

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CHAPTER XXI
Dartrey Fenellan

'You will hear the bell for your cold dinner very soon.'

'I am not hungry. I would so much rather talk—hear you. But you are hungry? You have been singing: twice: three times! Opera singers, they say, eat hot suppers; they drink stout. And I never heard your voice more effective. Yours is a voice that . . . something of the feeling one has in hearing cathedral voices: carry one up. I remember, in Dresden, once, a Fräulein Kühnstreich, a prodigy, very young, considering her accomplishments. But it was not the same.'

Nesta wondered at Dartrey Fenellan for staying so long with Mr. and Mrs. Blathenoy.

'Ah, Mr. Sowerby, if I am to have flattery, I cannot take it as a milliner's dumb figure wears the beautiful dress; I must point out my view of some of my merits.'

'Oh! do, I beg, Miss . . . You have a Christian name: and I too: and once . . . not Mr. Sowerby: yes, it was Dudley!'

'Quite accidentally, and a world of pardons entreated.'

'And Dudley begged Dudley might be Dudley always!'

He was deepening to the Barmby intonation—apparently Cupid's; but a shade more airily Pagan, not so fearfully clerical.

Her father had withdrawn Dartrey Fenellan from Mr. and Mrs. Blathenoy. Dr. Schlesien was bowing with Dartrey.

'And if Durandarte would only—but you are one with Miss Graves to depreciate my Durandarte, in

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favour of the more classical Jachimo; whom we all admire; but you shall be just,' said she, and she pouted. She had seen her father plant Dartrey Fenellan in the midst of a group of City gentlemen.

Simeon touched among them to pluck at his brother. He had not a chance; he retired, and swam into the salmon-net of seductive Mrs. Blathenoy's broad bright smile.

'It 's a matter of mines, and they 're hovering in the attitude of the query, like corkscrews over a bottle, profoundly indifferent to blood-relationship,' he said to her.

'Pray, stay and be consoled by me,' said the fair young woman. 'You are to point me out all the distinguished people. Is it true, that your brother has left the army?'

'Dartrey no longer wears the red. Here comes Colonel Corfe, who does. England has her army still!'

'His wife persuaded him?'

'You see he is wearing the black.'

'For her? How very very sad! Tell me—what a funnily dressed woman meeting that gentleman!'

'Hush—a friend of the warrior. Splendid weather, Colonel Corfe.'

'Superb toilettes!' The colonel eyed Mrs. Blathenoy dilatingly, advanced, bowed, and opened the siege.

She decided a calculation upon his age, made a wall of it, smilingly agreed with his encomium of the Concert, and toned her voice to Fenellan's comprehension: 'Did it occur recently?'

'Months; in Africa; I haven't the date.'

'Such numbers of people one would wish to know!

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CHAPTER XXI
Dartrey Fenellan

Who are those ladies holding a Court, where Mr. Radnor is?'

'Lady Carmine, Lady Swanage—if it is your wish?' interposed the colonel.

She dealt him a forgiving smile. 'And that pleasant-looking old gentleman?'

Colonel Corfe drew-up. Fenellan said: 'Are we veterans at forty or so?'

'Well, it's the romance, perhaps!' She raised her shoulders.

The colonel's intelligence ran a dog's nose for a lady's interjections. 'The romance? . . . at forty, fifty? gone? Miss Julinks, the great heiress and a beauty, has chosen him over the heads of all the young men of his time. Cranmer Lotsdale. Most romantic history!'

'She's in love with that, I suppose.'

'Now you direct my attention to him,' said Fenellan, 'the writing of the romantic history *has* made the texture look a trifle thready. You have a terrible eye.'

It was thrown to where the person stood who had first within a few minutes helped her to form critical estimates of men, more consciously to read them.

'Your brother stays in England?'

'The fear is, that he's off again.'

'Annoying for you. If I had a brother, I would not let him go.'

'How would you detain him?'

'Locks and bolts, clock wrong, hands and arms, kneeling—the fourth act of the Huguenots!'

'He went by way of the window, I think. But that was a lover.'

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'Oh! well!' she flushed. She did not hear the neglected and astonished colonel speak, and she sought diversion in saying to Fenellan: 'So many people of distinction are assembled here to-day! Tell me, who is that pompous gentleman, who holds his arms up doubled, as he walks?'

'Like flappers of a penguin: and advances in jerks: he is head of the great Firm of Quatley Brothers: Sir Abraham: finances or farms one of the South American Republics: we call him, Pride of Port. He consumes it and he presents it.'

'And who is that little man, who stops everybody?'

'People of distinction indeed! That little man—is your upper lip underrateing him? . . . When a lady's lip is erratically disdainful, it suggests a misuse of a copious treasury, deserving to be mulcted, punished—how?—who can say?—that little man, now that little man, with a lift of his little finger, could convulse the Bacon Market!'

Mrs. Blathenoy shook. Hearing Colonel Corfe exclaim: 'Bacon Market!' she let fly a peal. Then she turned to a fresh satellite, a round and a ruddy, 'at her service ever,' Mr. Beaves Urmsing, and repeated Fenellan's words. He, in unfeigned wonderment at such unsuspected powers, cried: 'Dear me!' and stared at the little man, making the pretty lady's face a twinkling dew.

He had missed the Concert. Was it first-rate? Ecstasy answered in the female voice.

'Hem'd fool I am to keep appointments!' he muttered.

She reproved him: 'Fie, Mr. Urmsing; it's the making of them, not the keeping!'

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CHAPTER XXI
Dartrey Fenellan

'Ah, my dear ma'am, if I'd had Blathenoy's luck when he made a certain appointment. And he was not so much older than me? The old ones get the prizes!'

Mr. Beaves Urmsing prompted Colonel Corfe to laugh in triumph. The colonel's eyebrows were up in fixity over sleepy lids. He brightened to propose the conducting of the pretty woman to the banquet.

'We shall see them going in,' said she. 'Mr. Radnor has a French cook, who does wonders. But I heard him asking for Mr. Beaves Urmsing. I'm sure he expected *The Marigolds* at his Concert.'

'Anything to oblige the company,' said the rustic ready chorister, clearing his throat.

The lady's feet were bent in the direction of a grassy knoll, where sunflowers, tulips, dahlias, peonies, of the sex eclipsed at a distance its roses and lilies. Fenellan saw Dartrey, still a centre of the merchantmen, strolling thither.

'And do you know, your brother is good enough to dine with us next week, Thursday, down here,' she murmured. 'I could venture to command?—if you are not induced.'

'Whichever word applies to a faithful subject.'

'I do so wish your brother had not left the army!'

'You have one son of Mars.'

Her eyes took the colonel up to cast him down: he was not the antidote. She said to him: 'Luciani's voice wears better than her figure.'

The colonel replied: 'I remember,' and corrected himself, 'at Eton, in jackets: she was not so particularly slim; never knew how to dress. You beat Italians there! She moved one as a youngster.'

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'Eton boys are so susceptible!'

'Why, hulloa, don't I remember her coming out!—and do you mean to tell me,' Mr. Beaves Urmsing brutally addressed the colonel, 'that you were at Eton when . . . why, what age do you give the poor woman, then!' He bellowed, 'Eh?' as it were a bull crowing.

The colonel retreated to one of his defensive corners. 'I am not aware that I meant to tell you anything.'

Mr. Beaves Urmsing turned square-breasted on Fenellan: 'Fellow's a born donkey!'

'And the mother lived?' said Fenellan.

Mr. Beaves Urmsing puffed with wrath at the fellow.

Five minutes later, in the midst of the group surrounding and felicitating Victor, he had sight of Fenellan conversing with fair ones, and it struck a light in him; he went three steps backward, with shouts. 'Dam funny fellow! eh? who is he? I must have that man at my table. Worth fifty Colonel Jackasses! And I've got a son in the Guards: and as much laugh in him, *he*'s got, as a bladder. But we'll make a party, eh, Radnor? with that friend o' yours. Dam funny fellow! and precious little of it going on now among the young lot. They're for seeing ghosts and gaping their jaws; all for the quavers instead of the capers.'

He sounded and thrummed his roguish fling-off for the capers. A second glimpse of Fenellan agitated the anecdote, as he called it, seizing Victor's arm, to have him out of earshot of the ladies. Delivery, not without its throes, was accomplished, but imperfectly, owing to sympathetic convulsions, under which Mr.

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CHAPTER XXI Dartrey Fenellan

Beaves Urmsing's countenance was crinkled of many colours, as we see the Spring rhubarb-leaf. Unable to repeat the brevity of Fenellan's rejoinder, he expatiated on it to convey it, swearing that it was the kind of thing done in the old days, when men were witty dogs:—'pat! and pat back! as in the pantomime.'

'Repartee!' said Victor. 'He has it. You shall know him. You're the man for him.'

'He for me, that he is!—"Hope the mother's doing well? My card":—eh? Grave as an owl! Look, there goes the donkey, lady to right and left, all ears for him—ha! ha! I must have another turn with your friend. "Mother lived, did she?" Dam funny fellow, all of the olden time! And a dinner, bachelor dinner, six of us, at my place, next week, say Wednesday, half-past six, for a long evening—flowing bowl—eh, shall it be?'

Nesta came looking to find her Captain Dartrey.

Mr. Beaves Urmsing grew courtly of the olden time. He spied Colonel Corfe anew, and 'Donkey!' rose to split the roar at his mouth, and full of his anecdote, he pursued some congenial acquaintances, crying to his host: 'Wednesday, mind! eh? by George, your friend's gizzarded me for the day!'

Plumped with the rich red stream of life, this last of the squires of old England thumped along among the guests, a very tuning-fork to keep them at their pitch of enthusiasm. He encountered Mr. Caddis, and it was an encounter. Mr. Caddis represented his political opinions; but here was this cur of a Caddis whineing his niminy note from his piminy nob, when he was asked for his hearty echo of the

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praises of this jolly good fellow come to waken the neighbourhood, to be a blessing, a blazing hearth, a fall of manna:—and thank the Lord for him, you desert-dog! 'He's a merchant prince, and he's a prince of a man, if you're for titles. Eh? you "assent to my encomiums." You'll be calling me Mr. Speaker next. Hang me, Caddis, if those Parliamentary benches of yours aren't freezing you from your seat up, and have got to your jaw—my belief!'

Mr. Caddis was left reflecting, that we have, in the dispensations of Providence, when we have a seat, to submit to castigations from butcherly men unaccountably commissioned to solidify the seat. He could have preached a discourse upon Success, to quiet the discontentment of the unseated. And our world of seats oddly gained, quaintly occupied, maliciously beset, insensately envied, needs the discourse. But it was not delivered, else would it have been here written down without mercy, as a medical prescript, one of the grand specifics. He met Victor, and, between his dread of him and the counsels of a position subject to stripes, he was a genial thaw. Victor beamed; for Mr. Caddis had previously stood eminent as an iceberg of the Lakelands party. Mr. Inchling and Mr. Caddis were introduced. The former in Commerce, the latter in Politics, their sustaining boast was, the being our stable Englishmen; and at once, with cousinly minds, they fell to chatting upon the nothings agreeably and seriously. Colney Durance forsook a set of ladies for fatter prey, and listened to them. What he said, Victor did not hear. The effect was always to be seen, with Inchling under Colney. Fenellan did better service, really good service.

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CHAPTER XXI
Dartrey Fenellan

Nataly played the heroine she was at heart. Why think of her as having to act a character! Twice had Carling that afternoon, indirectly and directly, stated Mrs. Burman to be near the end we crape a natural, a defensible, satisfaction to hear of:—not wishing it:—poor woman!—but pardonably, before man and all the angels, wishing, praying for the beloved one to enter into her earthly peace by the agency of the other's exit into her heavenly.

Fenellan and Colney came together, and said a word apiece of their friend.

'In his element! The dear old boy has the look of a goldfish, king of his globe.'

'The dear old boy has to me the look of a pot on the fire, with a loose lid.'

I may have the summons from Themison to-morrow, Victor thought. The success of the day was a wine that rocked the soberest of thoughts. For, strange to confess, ever since the fall on London Bridge, his heart, influenced in some degree by Nataly's depression perhaps, had been shadowed by doubts of his infallible instinct for success. Here, at a stroke, and before entering the house, he had the whole neighbourhood about him: he could feel that he and Nataly stood in the minds of the worthy people variously with the brightness if not with the warmth distinguishable in the bosom of Beaves Urmsing—the idea of whom gave Lakelands an immediate hearth-glow.

Armandine was thirteen minutes, by his watch, behind the time she had named. Small blame to her. He excused her to Lady Carmine, Lady Swanage, Lady Blachington, Mrs. Fanning, Sir Abraham Quatley, Mr.

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CHAPTER XXI
Dartrey Fenellan

Danny (of Bacon fame) and the rest of the group surrounding Nataly on the mound leftward of the white terraces descending to the lake; where she stood beating her foot fretfully at the word brought by Nesta, that Dartrey Fenellan had departed. It was her sunshine departed. But she went through her task of conversing amiably. Colney, for a wonder, consented to be useful in assisting Fenellan to relate stories of French Cooks; which were, like the Royal Hanoverian oyster, of an age for offering acceptable flavour to English hearers. Nesta drew her mother's attention to Priscilla Graves and Skepsey; the latter bending head and assenting. Nataly spoke of the charm of Priscilla's voice that day, in her duet with the Rev. Septimus. Mr. Pempton looked; he saw that Priscilla was proselytizing. She was perfection to him but for one blotting thing. With grief on his eyelids, he said to Nataly or to himself: 'Meat!'

'Dear friend, don't ride your hobby *over* us,' she replied.

'But it's with that object they mount it,' said Victor.

The greater ladies of the assembly were quite ready to accuse the sections, down to the individuals, of the social English (reserving our elect) of an itch to be tyrants.

Colney was apologizing for them, with his lash: 'It's merely the sensible effect of a want of polish of the surface when they rub together.'

And he heard Carling exclaim to Victor: 'How comes the fellow here!'

Skepsey had rushed across an open space to intercept a leisurely progressive man, whose hat was of

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CHAPTER XXI
Dartrey Fenellan

the shape Victor knew; and the man wore the known black gaiters. In appearance, he had the likeness of a fallen parson.

Carling and Victor crossed looks that were questions carrying their answers.

Nataly's eyes followed Victor's. 'Who is the man?' she said; and she got no reply beyond a perky sparkle in his gaze.

Others were noticing the man, who was trying to pass by Skepsey, now on his right side, now on his left.

'There'll be no stopping him,' Carling said, and he slipped to the rear.

At this juncture, Armandine's mellow bell proclaimed her readiness.

Victor rubbed the back of his head. Nataly asked him: 'Dear, is it that man?'

He nodded scantly: 'Expected, expected. I think we have our summons from Armandine. One moment —poor soul! poor soul! Lady Carmine—Sir Abraham Quatley. Will you lead? Lady Blachington, I secure you. One moment.'

He directed Nataly to pair a few of the guests; he hurried down the slope of sward.

Nataly applied to Colney Durance. 'Do you know the man?—is it that man?'

Colney rejoined: 'The man's name is Jarniman.'

Armandine's bell swung melodiously. The guests had grouped, thickening for the stream to procession. Mrs. Blathenoy claimed Fenellan; she requested him to tell her whether he had known Mrs. Victor Radnor many years. She mused. 'You like her?'

'One likes one's dearest of friends among women, does one not?'

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The lady nodded to his response. 'And your brother?'

'Dartrey is devoted to her.'

'I am sure,' said she, 'your brother is a chivalrous gentleman. I like her too.' She came to her sentiment through the sentiment of the chivalrous gentleman. Sinking from it, she remarked that Mr. Radnor was handsome still. Fenellan commended the subject to her, as one to discourse of when she met Dartrey. A smell of a trap-hatch half-open, afflicted and sharpened him. It was Blathenoy's breath: husbands of young wives do these villanies, for the sake of showing their knowledge. Fenellan forbore to praise Mrs. Victor: he laid his colours on Dartrey. The lady gave ear till she reddened. He meant no harm, meant nothing but good; and he was lighting the most destructive of our lower fires.

Visibly, that man Jarniman was disposed of with ease. As in the street-theatres of crowing Punch, distance enlisted pantomime to do the effective part of the speeches. Jarniman's hat was off, he stood bent, he delivered his message. He was handed over to Skepsey's care for the receiving of meat and drink. Victor returned; he had Lady Blachington's hand on his arm; he was all hers, and in the heart of his company of guests at the same time. Eyes that had read him closely for years, were unable to spell a definite signification on his face, below the overflowing happiness of the hospitable man among contented guests. He had in fact something within to enliven him; and that was the more than suspicion, amounting to an odour of certainty, that Armandine intended one of her grand surprises for her master, and for the

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hundred and fifty or so to be seated at her tables in the unwarmed house of Lakelands.

CHAPTER XXII

Concerns the Intrusion of Jarniman

Armandine did her wonders. There is not in the wide range of the Muses a more responsive instrument than man to his marvellous cook; and if his notes were but as flowing as his pedals are zealous, we should be carried on the tale of the enthusiasm she awakened, away from the rutted highroad, where History now thinks of tightening her girdle for an accelerated pace.

The wonders were done: one hundred and seventy guests plenteously fed at tables across the great Concert Hall, down a length of the conservatory-glass, on soups, fish, meats, and the kitchen-garden, under play of creative sauces, all in the persuasive steam of savouriness; every dish, one may say, advancing, curtseying, swimming to be your partner, instead of passively submitting to the eye of appetite, consenting to the teeth, as that rather melancholy procession of the cold, resembling established spinsters thrice-corseted in decorum, will appear to do. Whether Armandine had the thought or that she simply acted in conformity with a Frenchwoman's direct good sense, we do require to smell a sort of animation in the meats we consume. We are still perhaps traceably related to the Adamite old-youngster just on his legs, who betrayed at every turn his Darwinian begin-

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nings, and relished a palpitating unwillingness in the thing refreshing him; only we young-oldsters cherish the milder taste for willingness, with a throb of the vanquished in it. And a seeming of that we get from the warm roast. The banquet to be fervently remembered, should smoke, should send out a breath to meet us. Victor's crowded saloon-carriage was one voice of eulogy, to raise Armandine high as the finale rockets bursting over Wrensham Station at the start Londonward. How had she managed? We foolishly question the arts of magicians.

Mr. Pempton was an apparent dissentient, as the man must be who is half a century ahead of his fellows in humaneness, and saddened by the display of slaughtered herds and their devourers. He had picked out his vegetable and farinaceous morsels, wherever he could get them uncontaminated; enough for sustenance; and the utmost he could show was, that he did not complain. When mounted and ridden by the satirist, in wrath at him for systematically feasting the pride of the martyr on the maceration of his animal part, he put on his martyr's pride, which assumed a perfect contentment in the critical depreciation of opposing systems: he was drawn to state, as he had often done, that he considered our animal part shamefully and dangerously overnourished, and that much of the immorality of the world was due to the present excessive indulgence in meats. 'Not in drink?' Miss Graves inquired. 'No,' he said boldly; 'not equally; meats are more insidious. I say nothing of taking life—of fattening for that express purpose: diseases of animals: bad blood made: cruelty superinduced:—it will be seen to be, it will be

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CHAPTER XXII
Concerns the Intrusion of Jarniman

looked back on, as a form of, a second stage of, cannibalism. Let that pass. I say, that for excess in drinking, the penalty is paid instantly, or at least on the morrow.'

'Paid by the drunkard's wife, you should say.'

'Whereas intemperance in eating, corrupts constitutionally, more spiritually vitiates, *we* think: on the whole, gluttony is the least-generous of the vices.'

Colney lured Mr. Pempton through a quagmire of the vices to declare, that it brutalized; and stammeringly to adopt the suggestion, that our breeding of English ladies—those lights of the civilized world—can hardly go with a feeding upon flesh of beasts. Priscilla regretted that champagne should have to be pleaded in excuse of impertinences to her sex. They were both combative, nibbed for epigram, edged to inflict wounds; and they were set to shudder openly at one another's practices; they might have exposed to Colney which of the two maniacal sections of his English had the vaster conceit of superiority in purity; they were baring themselves, as it were with a garment flung-off at each retort. He reproached them for undermineing their countrymen; whose Falstaff panics demanded blood of animals to restore them; and their periods of bragging, that they should brandify their wits to imagine themselves Vikings.

Nataly interposed. She was vexed with him. He let his eyelids drop: but the occasion for showing the prickliness of the bristly social English, could not be resisted. Dr. Peter Yatt was tricked to confess, that small annoyances were, in his experience,

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CHAPTER XXII
Concerns the Intrusion of Jarniman

powerful on the human frame; and Dr. John Cormyn was very neatly brought round to assure him he was mistaken if he supposed the homœopathic doctor who smoked was exercising a destructive influence on the efficacy of the infinitesimal doses he prescribed; Dr. Yatt chuckled a laugh at globules; Dr. Cormyn at patients treated as horses; while Mr. Catkin was brought to praise the smoke of tobacco as our sanctuary from the sex; and Mr. Peridon quietly denied, that the taking of it into his nostrils from the puffs of his friend caused him sad silences. Nesta flew to protect the admirer of her beloved Louise. Her subsiding young excitement of the day set her doating on that moony melancholy in Mr. Peridon.

No one could understand the grounds for Colney's more than usual waspishness. He trotted out the fulgent and tonal Church of the Rev. Septimus; the skeleton of worship, so truly showing the spirit, in that of Dudley Sowerby's family; maliciously admiring both; and he had a spar with Fenellan, ending in a snarl and a shout. Victor said to him: 'Yes, here, as much as you like, old Colney, but I tell you, you've staggered that poor woman Lady Blachington to-day, and her husband too; and I don't know how many besides. What the pleasure of it can be, I can't guess.'

'Nor I,' said Fenellan, 'but I'll own I feel envious; like the girl among a family of boys I knew, who were all of them starved in their infancy by a miserly father, that gave them barely a bit of Graves to eat and not a drop of Pempton to drink; and on the afternoon of his funeral, I found them in the drawing-room, four lank

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CHAPTER XXII
Concerns the Intrusion of Jarniman

fellows, heels up, walking on their hands, from long practice; and the girl informed me, that her brothers were able so to send the little blood they had in their bodies to their brains, and always felt quite cheerful for it, happy, and empowered to deal with the problems of the universe; as they couldn't on their legs; but she, poor thing, was forbidden to do the same! And I'm like her. I care for decorum too much to get the brain to act on Colney's behaviour; but I see it enraptures him and may be comprehensible to the topsy-turvey.'

Victor rubbed hands. It was he who filled Colney's bag of satiric spite. In addition to the downright lunacy of the courting of country society, by means of the cajolements witnessed this day, a suspicion that Victor was wearing a false face over the signification of Jarniman's visit and meant to deceive the trustful and too-devoted loving woman he seemed bound to wreck, irritated the best of his nature. He had a resolve to pass an hour with the couple, and speak and insist on hearing plain words before the night had ended. But Fenellan took it out of him. Victor's show of a perfect contentment emulating Pempton's, incited Colney to some of his cunning rapier-thrusts with his dancing adversary; and the heat which is planted in us for the composition of those cool epigrams, will not allow plain words to follow. Or, handing him over to the police of the Philistines, you may put it, that a habit of assorting spices will render an earnest simplicity distasteful. He was invited by Nataly to come home with them; her wish for his presence, besides personal, was moved by an intuition, that his counsel might

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specially benefit them. He shrugged; he said he had work at his chambers.

CHAPTER XXII
Concerns the Intrusion of Jarniman

'Work!' Victor ejaculated: he never could reach to a right comprehension of labour, in regard to the very unremunerative occupation of literature. Colney he did not want, and he let him go, as Nataly noticed, without a sign of the reluctance he showed when the others, including Fenellan, excused themselves.

'So! we're alone?' he said, when the door of the hall had closed on them. He kept Nesta talking of the success of the day until she, observing her mother's look, simulated the setting-in of a frenzied yawn. She was kissed, and she tripped to her bed.

'Now we are alone,' Nataly said.

'Well, dear, and the day was, you must own . . .' he sought to trifle with her heavy voice; but she recalled him: 'Victor!' and the naked anguish in her cry of his name was like a foreign world threatening the one he filled.

'Ah, yes; that man, that Jarniman. You saw him, I remember. You recollected him?—stouter than he was. In her service ever since. Well, a little drop of bitter, perhaps: no harm, tonic.'

'Victor, is she very ill?'

'My love, don't feel at your side: she is ill, ill, not the extreme case: not yet: old and ill. I told Skepsey to give the man refreshment: he had to do his errand.'

'What? why did he come?'

'Curious; he made acquaintance with Skepsey, and appears to have outwitted poor Skepsey, as far as I see it. But if that woman thinks of intimidating me now——!' His eyes brightened; he had sprung from

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CHAPTER XXII
Concerns the Intrusion of Jarniman

evasions. 'Living in flagrant sin, she says: you and I! She will not have it; warns me. Heard this day at noon of company at Lakelands. Jarniman off at once. Are to live in obscurity;—you and I! if together! Dictates from her death-bed—I suppose her death-bed.'

'Dearest,' Nataly pressed hand on her left breast, 'may we not think that she may be right?'

'An outrageous tyranny of a decrepit woman naming herself wife when she is only a limpet of vitality, with drugs for blood, hanging-on to blast the healthy and vigorous! I remember old Colney's once, in old days, calling that kind of marriage a sarcophagus. It was to me. There I lay—see myself lying! wasting! Think what you can good of her, by all means. From her bed! despatches that Jarniman to me from her bedside, with the word, that she cannot in her conscience allow—what imposition was it I practised? . . . flagrant sin?—it would have been an infinitely viler. . . . She is the cause of suffering enough: I bear no more from her; I've come to the limit. She has heard of Lakelands: she has taken one of her hatreds to the place. She might have written, might have sent me a gentleman, privately. No: it must be done in dramatic style—for effect: her confidential—lawyer? —doctor?—butler! Perhaps to frighten me:—the boy she knew, and—poor soul! I don't mean to abuse her: but such conduct as this is downright brutal. I laugh at it, I snap my fingers. I can afford to despise it. Only I do say it deserves to be called abominable.'

'Victor, has she used a threat?'

'Am I brought to listen to any of her threats! —Funny thing, I'm certain that woman never can

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CHAPTER XXII
Concerns the Intrusion of Jarniman

think of me except as the boy she knew. I saw her first when she was first a widow. She would keep talking to me of the seductions of the metropolis—kept informing me I was a young man . . . shaking her head. I've told you. She—well, I know we are mixtures, women as well as men. I can, I hope, grant the same—I believe I can—allowances to women as to men; we are poor creatures, all of us—in one sense: though I won't give Colney his footing; there's a better way of reading us. I hold fast to Nature. No violation of Nature, my good Colney! We can live the lives of noble creatures; and I say that happiness was meant for us:—just as, when you sit down to your dinner, you must do it cheerfully, and you make good blood: otherwise all's wrong. There's the right answer to Colney! But when a woman like that . . . and marries a boy: well, twenty-one—not quite that: and an innocent, a positive innocent—it may seem incredible, after a term of school-life: it was a fact: I can hardly understand it myself when I look back. Marries him! And then sets to work to persecute him, because he has blood in his veins, because he worships beauty; because he seeks a real marriage, a real mate. And, I say it!—let the world take its own view, the world is wrong!—because he preferred a virtuous life to the kind of life she would, she must—why, necessarily!—have driven him to, with a mummy's grain of nature in his body. And I am made of flesh, I admit it.'

'Victor, dearest, her threat concerns only your living at Lakelands.'

'Pray, don't speak excitedly, my love,' he replied to the woman whose tones had been subdued to

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CHAPTER XXII Concerns the Intrusion of Jarniman

scarce more than waver. 'You see how I meet it: water off a duck's back or Indian solar beams on the skin of a Hindoo! I despise it—hardly worth contempt;—But, come: our day was a good one. Fenellan worked well. Old Colney was Colney Durance, of course. He did no real mischief.'

'And you will not determine to enter Lakelands—not yet, dear?' said Nataly.

'My own girl, leave it all to me.'

'But, Victor, I must, must know.'

'See the case. You have lots of courage. We can't withdraw. Her intention is mischief. I believe the woman keeps herself alive for it: we've given her another lease!—though it can only be for a very short time; Themison is precise; Carling too. If we hold back—I have great faith in Themison—the woman's breath on us is confirmed. We go down, then; complete the furnishing, quite leisurely; accept—listen—accept one or two invitations: impossible to refuse!—but they are accepted!—and we defy her:—a crazy old creature: imagines herself the wife of the ex-Premier, widow of Prince Le Boo, engaged to the Chinese Ambassador, et cætera. Leave the tussle with that woman to me. No, we don't repeat the error of Craye Farm and Creckholt. And here we have stout friends. Not to speak of Beaves Urmsing: a picture of Old Christmas England! You took to him?—must have taken to Beaves Urmsing! The Marigolds! And Sir Rodwell and Lady Blachington are altogether above the mark of Sir Humphrey and Lady Pottil, and those half and half Mountneys. There's a warm centre of home in Lakelands. But I know my Nataly: she is thinking of our girl. Here

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is the plan: We stand our ground: my dear soul won't forsake me: only there's the thought of Fredi, in the event . . . improbable enough. I lift Fredi out of the atmosphere awhile; she goes to my cousins the Duvidney ladies.'

Nataly was hit by a shot. 'Can you imagine it, Victor?'

'Regard it as done.'

'They will surely decline!'

'Their feeling for General Radnor is a worship.'

'All the more . . .?'

'The son inherits it. He goes to them personally. Have you ever known me personally fail? Fredi stays at Moorsedge for a month or two. Dorothea and Virginia Duvidney will give her a taste of a new society; good for the girl. All these little shiftings can be turned to good. Meantime, I say, we stand our ground: but you are not to be worried; for though we have gone too far to recede, we need not and we will not make the entry into Lakelands until —you know: that is, auspiciously, to suit you in every way. Thus I provide to meet contingencies. What one may really fancy is, that the woman did but threaten. There's her point of view to be considered: silly, crazy; but one sees it. We are not sure that she struck a blow at Craye or Creckholt. I wonder she never wrote. She was frightened, when she came to manage her property, of signing her name to anything. Absurd, that sending of Jarniman! However, it's her move; we make a corresponding disposition of our chessmen.'

'And I am to lose my Nesta for a month?' Nataly said, after catching here and there at the fitful gleams

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CHAPTER XXII
Concerns the Intrusion of Jarniman

of truce or comfort dropped from his words. And simultaneously, the reproach of her mind to her nature for again and so constantly yielding to the domination of his initiative—unable to find the words, even the ideas, to withstand him,—brought big tears. Angry at herself both for the internal feebleness and the exhibition of it, she blinked and begged excuse. There might be nothing that should call her to resist him. She could not do much worse than she had done to-day. The reflection, that to-day she had been actually sustained by the expectation of a death to come, diminished her estimate of to-morrow's burden on her endurance, in making her seem a less criminal woman, who would have no such expectation:—which was virtually a stab at a fellow-creature's future. Her head was acute to work in the direction of the casuistries and the sensational webs and films. Facing Victor, it was a block.

But the thought came: how could she meet those people about Lakelands, without support of the recent guilty whispers! She said coldly, her heart shaking her: 'You think there has been a recovery?'

'Invalids are up and down. They are—well, no; I should think she dreads the . . .' he kept 'surgeon' out of hearing. 'Or else she means this for the final stroke: "though I 'm lying here, I can still make him feel." That, or—poor woman—she has her notions of right and wrong.'

'Could we not now travel for a few weeks, Victor?'

'Certainly, dear; we will, after we have kept our engagements to dine—I accepted—with the Blathenoys, the Blachingtons, Beaves Urmsing.'

Nataly's vision of the peaceful lost little dairy

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CHAPTER XXII Concerns the Intrusion of Jarniman

cottage swelled to brilliance, like the large tear at the fall; darkening under her present effort to comprehend the necessity it was for him to mix and be foremost with the world. Unable to grasp it perfectly in mind, her compassionate love embraced it: she blamed herself, for being the obstruction to him.

'Very well,' she said on a sigh. 'Then we shall not have to let our girl go from us?'

'Just a few weeks. In the middle of dinner, I scribbled a telegram to the Duvidneys, for Skepsey to take.'

'Speaking of Nesta?'

'Of my coming to-morrow. They won't stop me. I dine with them, sleep at the Wells; hotel for a night. We are to be separated for a night.'

She laid her hand in his and gave him a passing view of her face: 'For two, dear. I am . . . that man's visit—rather shaken: I shall have a better chance of sleeping if I know I am not disturbing you.'

She was firm; and they kissed and parted. Each had an unphrased speculation upon the power of Mrs. Burman to put division between them.

CHAPTER XXIII

Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

The maiden ladies Dorothea and Virginia Duvidney were thin-sweet old-fashioned grey gentlewomen, demurely conscious of their excellence and awake

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

to the temptation in the consciousness, who imposed a certain reflex primness on the lips of the world when addressing them or when alluding to them. For their appearance was picturesque of the ancestral time, and their ideas and scrupulousness of delivery suggested the belated in ripeness; orchard apples under a snow-storm; or any image that will ceremoniously convey the mind's profound appreciation together with the tooth's panic dread of tartness. They were by no means tart; only, as you know, the tooth is apprehensively nervous; an uninviting sign will set it on edge. Even the pen which would sketch them has a spell on it and must don its coat of office, walk the liveried footman behind them.

Their wealth, their deeds of charity, their modesty, their built grey locks, their high repute; a 'Chippendale elegance' in a quaintly formal correctness, that they had, as Colney Durance called it; gave them some queenliness, and allowed them to claim the ear as an oracle and banish rebellious argument. Intuitive knowledge, assisted by the Rev. Stuart Rem and the Rev. Abram Posterley, enabled them to pronounce upon men and things; not without effect; their country owned it; the foreigner beheld it. Nor were they corrupted by the servility of the surrounding ear. They were good women, striving to be humbly good. They might, for all the little errors they nightly unrolled to their perceptions, have stood before the world for a study in the white of our humanity. And this may be but a washed wall, it is true: revolutionary sceptics are measuring the depths of it. But the hue refreshes, the world admires; and we know it an object of aim to the better-

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

most of the wealthy. If, happily, complacent circumstances have lifted us to the clean paved platform out of grip of puddled clay and bespattering wheeltracks, we get our chance of coming to it.

Possessing, for example, nine thousand pounds per annum in Consols, and not expending the whole of it upon our luxuries, we are, without further privation, near to kindling the world's enthusiasm for whiteness. Yet there, too, we find, that character has its problems to solve; there are shades in salt. We must be charitable, but we should be just; we give to the poor of the land, but we are eminently the friends of our servants; duty to mankind diverts us not from the love we bear to our dog; and with a pathetic sorrow for sin, we discard it from sight and hearing. We *hate dirt*. Having said so much, having shown it, by sealing the mouth of Mr. Stuart Rem and icing the veins of Mr. Abram Posterley, in relation to a dreadful public case and a melancholy private, we have a pleased sense of entry into the world's ideal.

At the same time, we protest our unworthiness. Acknowledgeing that they were not purely spotless, these ladies genuinely took the tiny fly-spot for a spur to purification; and they viewed it as a patch to raise in relief their goodness. They gazed on it, saw themselves in it, and veiled it: warned of the cunning of an oft-defeated Tempter.

To do good and sleep well, was their sowing and their reaping. Uneasy consciences could not have slept. The sleeping served for proof of an accurate reckoning and an expungeing of the day's debits. They differed in opinion now and then, as we see companion waves of the river, blown by a gust, roll a shadow

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

between them; and almost equally transient were their differences with a world that they condemned when they could not feel they (as an embodiment of their principles) were leading it. The English world at times betrayed a restiveness in the walled pathway of virtue; for, alas, it closely neighbours the French; only a Channel, often dangerously smooth, to divide: but it is not perverted for long; and the English Funds are always constant and a tower. Would they be suffered to be so, if libertinism were in the ascendant?

Colney Durance was acquainted with the Duvidney ladies. Hearing of the journey to them and the purport of it, he said, with the mask upon glee: 'Then Victor has met his match!' Nataly had sent for him to dine with her in Victor's absence: she was far from grieved, as to the result, by his assurance to her, that Victor had not a chance. Colney thought so. 'Just like him! to be off gaily to try and overcome or come over the greatest power in England.' They were England herself; the squat old woman she has become by reason of her overlapping numbers of the comfortable fund-holder annuitants: a vast body of passives and negatives, living by precept, according to rules of precedent, and supposing themselves to be righteously guided because of their continuing undisturbed. Them he branded, as hypocritical materialists, and the country for pride in her sweetmeat plethora of them:—mixed with an ancient Hebrew fear of offence to an inscrutable Lord, eccentrically appeasable through the dreary iteration of the litany of sinfulness. He was near a truth; and he had the heat of it on him.

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

Satirists in their fervours might be near it to grasp it, if they could be moved to moral distinctness, mental intention, with a preference of strong plain speech over the crack of their whips. Colney could not or would not praise our modern adventurous, experimental, heroic, tramping active, as opposed to yonder pursy passives and negatives; he had occasions for flicking the fellow sharply: and to speak of the Lord as our friend present with us, palpable to Reason, perceptible to natural piety solely through the reason, which justifies punishment; that would have stopped his mouth upon the theme of God-forsaken creatures. Our satirist is an executioner by profession, a moralist in excuse, or at the tail of it; though he thinks the position reversed, when he moralizes angrily to have his angry use of the scourge condoned. Nevertheless, he fills a serviceable place; and certainly he is not happy in his business. Colney suffered as heavily as he struck. If he had been no more than a mime in the motley of satire, he would have sucked compensation from the acid of his phrases, for the failure to prick and goad, and work amendment.

He dramatized to Nataly some of the scene going on at the Wells: Victor's petition; his *fugue* in urgency of it; the brief reply of Miss Dorothea and her muted echo Miss Virginia. He was rather their apologist for refusing. But, as when, after himself listening to their 'views,' he had deferentially withdrawn from the ladies of Moorsedge, and had then beheld their strangely-hatted lieutenants and the regiments of the toneless respectable on the pantiles and the mounts, the curse upon the satirist impelled him to generalize. The quiet good ladies were multiplied: they were

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

'the thousands of their sisters, petticoated or long-coated or buck-skinned; comfortable annuitants under clerical shepherding, close upon outnumbering the labourers they paralyze at home and stultify abroad.' Colney thumped away. The country's annuitants had for type 'the figure with the helmet of the Owl-Goddess and the trident of the Earth-shaker, seated on a wheel, at the back of penny-pieces; in whom you see neither the beauty of nakedness nor the charm of drapery; not the helmet's dignity or the trident's power; but she has patently that which stops the wheel; and posing for representative of an imperial nation, she helps to pass a penny.' So he passed his epigram, heedless of the understanding or attention of his hearer; who temporarily misjudged him for a man impelled by the vanity of literary point and finish, when indeed it was hot satiric spite, justified of its aim, which crushed a class to extract a drop of scathing acid, in the interests of the country, mankind as well. Nataly wanted a picture painted, colours and details, that she might get a vision of the scene at Moorsedge. She did her best to feel an omen and sound it, in his question 'whether the yearly increasing army of the orderly annuitants and their parasites does not demonstrate the proud old country as a sheath for pith rather than of the vital run of sap.' Perhaps it was patriotic to inquire; and doubtless she was the weakest of women; she could follow no thought; her heart was beating blindly beside Victor, hopeing for the refusal painful to her through his disappointment.

'You think me foolish,' she made answer to one of Colney's shrugs; 'and it has come to that pitch with

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

me, that I cannot be sensible of a merit except in being one with him—obeying, is the word. And I have never yet known him fail. That terrible Lakelands wears a different look to me, when I think of what he can do; though I would give half my days to escape it.'

She harped on the chord of feverish extravagance; the more hateful to Colney because of his perceiving, that she simulated a blind devotedness to stupefy her natural pride; and he was divided between stamping on her for an imbecile and dashing at Victor for a maniac. But her situation rendered her pitiable. 'You will learn to-morrow what Victor has done,' he said, and thought how the simple words carried the bitterness.

That was uttered within a few minutes of midnight, when the ladies of Moorsedge themselves, after an exhausting resistance to their dearest relative, were at the hall-door of the house with Victor, saying the good-night, to which he responded hurriedly, cordially, dumbly, a baffled man. They clasped hands. Miss Dorothea said: '*You*, Victor, *always*.' Miss Virginia said: 'You will be sure of welcome.' He walked out upon the moonless night; and for lack of any rounded object in the smothering darkness to look at, he could nowhere take moorings to gather himself together and define the man who had undergone so portentous a defeat. He was glad of quarters at an hotel, a solitary bed, absence from his Nataly.

For their parts, the ladies were not less shattered. They had no triumph in their victory: the weight of it bore them down. They closed, locked, shot the bolts and fastened the chain of the door. They had to

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

be reminded by the shaking of their darling dog Tasso's curly silky coat, that he had not taken his evening's trot to notify malefactors of his watchfulness and official wrath at sound of footfall or a fancied one. Without consultation, they unbolted the door, and Tasso went forth, to 'compose his vesper hymn,' as Mr. Posterley once remarked amusingly.

Though not pretending to the Muse's crown so far, the little dog had qualities to entrance the spinster sex. His mistresses talked of him; of his readiness to go forth; of the audible first line of his hymn or sonnet; of his instinct telling him that something was wrong in the establishment. For most of the servants at Moorsedge were prostrated by a fashionable epidemic; a slight attack, the doctor said; but Montague, the butler, had withdrawn for the nursing of his wife; Perrin, the footman, was confined to his chamber; Manton, the favourite maid, had appeared in the morning with a face that caused her banishment to bed; and the cook, Mrs. Bannister, then sighingly agreed to send up cold meat for the ladies' dinner. Hence their melancholy inhospitality to their cousin Victor, who had, in spite of his errors, the right to claim his place at their table, was 'of the blood,' they said. He was recognized as the living prince of it. His every gesture, every word, recalled the General. The trying scene with him had withered them, they did not speak of it; each had to the other the look of a vessel that has come out of a gale. Would they sleep? They scarcely dared ask it of themselves. They had done rightly; silence upon that reflection seemed best. It was the silence

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

of an inward agitation; still they knew the power of good consciences to summon sleep.

Tasso was usually timed for five minutes. They were astonished to discover by the clock, that they had given him ten. He was very quiet: if so, and for whatever he did, he had his reason, they said: he was a dog endowed with reason: endowed—and how they wished that Mr. Stuart Rem would admit it!—with, their love of the little dog believed (and Mr. Posterley acquiesced), a soul. Do but think it of dear animals, and any form of cruelty to them becomes an impossibility, Mr. Stuart Rem! But he would not be convinced: ungenerously indeed he named Mr. Posterley a courtier. The ladies could have retorted, that Mr. Posterley had not a brother who was the celebrated surgeon Sir Nicholas Rem.

Usually Tasso came running in when the hall-door was opened to him. Not a sound of him could be heard. The ladies blew his familiar whistle. He trotted back to a third appeal, and was, unfortunately for them, not caressed; he received reproaches from two forefingers directed straight at his reason. He saw it and felt it. The hug of him was deferred to the tender good-night to him in his basket at the foot of the ladies' beds.

On entering their spacious bedchamber, they were so fatigued that sleep appeared to their minds the compensating logical deduction. Miss Dorothea suppressed a yawn, and inflicted it upon Miss Virginia, who returned it, with an apology, and immediately had her sister's hand on her shoulder, for an attempted control of one of the irresistibles; a spectacle imparting bitter shudders and shots to the sympathetic jaw-

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

bones of an observer. Hand at mouth, for not in privacy would they have been guilty of exposing a grimace, they signified, under an interim smile, their maidenly submission to the ridiculous force of nature: after which, Miss Virginia retired to the dressing-room, absorbed in woeful recollection of the resolute No they had been compelled to reiterate, in response to the most eloquent and, saving for a single instance, admirable man, their cousin, the representative of 'the blood,' supplicating them. A recreant thankfulness coiled within her bosom at the thought, that Dorothea, true to her office of speaker, had tasked herself with the cruel utterance and repetition of the word. Victor's wonderful eyes, his voice, yet more than his urgent pleas; and also, in the midst of his fiery flood of speech, his gentleness, his patience, pathos, and a man's tone through it all; were present to her.

Disrobed, she knocked at the door.

'I have called to you twice,' Dorothea said; and she looked a motive for the call.

'What is it?' said Virginia, with faltering sweetness, with a terrible divination.

The movement of a sigh was made. 'Are you aware of anything, dear?'

Virginia was taken with the contrary movement of a sniff. But the fear informing it prevented it from being venturesome. Doubt of the pure atmosphere of their bedchamber, appeared to her as too heretic even for the positive essay. In affirming, that she was not aware of anything, her sight fell on Tasso. His eyeballs were those of a little dog that has been awfully questioned.

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

'It is more than a suspicion,' said Dorothea; and plainly now, while open to the seductions of any pleasing infidel testimony, her nose in repugnance convicted him absolutely.

Virginia's nose was lowered a few inches; it inhaled and stopped midway. 'You must be mistaken, dear. He never . . .'

'But are you insensible to the . . .' Dorothea's eyelids fainted.

Virginia dismissed the forlornest of efforts at incredulity. A whiff of Tasso had smitten her. 'Ah!' she exclaimed and fell away. 'Is it Tasso! How was it you noticed nothing before undressing, dear?'

'Thinking of what we have gone through to-night! I forgot him. At last the very strange . . . The like of it I have not ever! . . . And upon that thick coat! And, dear, it is late. We are in the morning hours.'

'But, my dear—Oh, dear, what is to be done with him?'

That was the crucial point for discussion. They had no servant to give them aid; Manton, they could not dream of disturbing. And Tasso's character was in the estimate; he hated washing; it balefully depraved his temper; and not only, creature of habit that he was, would he decline to lie down anywhere save in their bedroom, he would lament, plead, insist unremittingly, if excluded; terrifying every poor invalid of the house. Then again, were they at this late hour to dress themselves, and take him downstairs, and light a fire in the kitchen, and boil sufficient water to give him a bath and scrubbing? Cold water would be death to him. Besides, he would

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

ring out his alarum for the house to hear, pour out all his poetry, poor dear, as Mr. Posterley called it, at a touch of cold water. The catastrophe was one to weep over, the dilemma a trial of the strongest intelligences.

In addition to reviews of their solitary alternative—the having of a befouled degraded little dog in their chamber through the night, they were subjected to a conflict of emotions when eyeing him: and there came to them the painful, perhaps irreverent, perhaps uncharitable, thought:—that the sinner who has rolled in the abominable, must cleanse him and do things to polish him and perfume before again embraced even by the mind: if indeed we can *ever* have our old sentiment for him again! Mr. Stuart Rem might decide it for them. Nay, before even the heart embraces him, he must completely purify himself. That is to say, the ordinary human sinner—save when a relative. Contemplating Tasso, the hearts of the ladies gushed out in pity of an innocent little dog, knowing not evil, dependent on his friends for help to be purified;—necessarily kept at a distance: the very look of him prescribed extreme separation, as far as practicable. But they had proof of a love almost greater than it was previous to the offence, in the tender precautions they took to elude repulsion.

He was rolling on the rug, communicating contagion. Flasks of treble-distilled lavender water, and their favourite, traditional in the family, *eau d'Arquebusade*, were on the toilet-table. They sprinkled his basket, liberally sprinkled the rug and the little dog. Perfume-pastilles were in one of the sitting-rooms below; and Virginia would have gone down softly to

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

fetch a box, but Dorothea restrained her, in pity for the servants, with the remark: 'It would give us a nightmare of a Roman Catholic Cathedral!' A bit of the window was lifted by Dorothea, cautiously, that prowling outsiders might not be attracted. Tasso was wooed to his basket. He seemed inquisitive; the antidote of his naughtiness excited him; his tail circled after his muzzle several times; then he lay. A silken scarf steeped in *eau d'Arquebusade* was flung across him.

Their customary devout observances concluded, lights were extinguished, and the ladies kissed, and entered their beds.

Their beds were not homely to them. Dorothea thought that Virginia was long in settling herself. Virginia did not like the sound of Dorothea's double sigh. Both listened anxiously for the doings of Tasso. He rested.

He was uneasy; he was rounding his basket once more; unaware of the exaggeration of his iniquitous conduct, poor innocent, he shook that dreadful coat of his! He had displaced the prophylactic cover of the scarf.

He drove them in a despair to speculate on the contention between the perfume and the stench in junction, with such a doubt of the victory of which of the two, as drags us to fear our worst. It steals into our nostrils, possesses them. As the History of Mankind has informed us, we were led up to our civilization by the nose. But Philosophy warns us on that eminence, to beware of trusting exclusively to our conductor, lest the mind of us at least be plunged back into barbarism. The ladies hated both

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

the cause and the consequence, they had a revulsion from the object, of the above contention. But call it not a contention: there is nobility in that. This was a compromise, a degrading union, with very sickening results. Whether they came of an excess of the sprinkling, could not well be guessed. The drenching at least was righteously intended.

Beneath their shut eyelids, they felt more and more the oppression of a darkness not laden with slumber. They saw it in solidity; themselves as restless billows, driven dashing to the despondent sigh. Sleep was denied them.

Tasso slept. He had sinned unknowingly, and that is not a spiritual sin; the chastisement confers the pardon.

But why was this ineffable blessing denied to them? Was it that they might have a survey of all the day's deeds and examine them under the cruel black beams of Insomnia?

Virginia said: 'You are wakeful.'

'Thoughtful,' was the answer.

A century of the midnight rolled on.

Dorothea said: 'He behaved very beautifully.'

'I looked at the General's portrait while he besought us,' Virginia replied.

'One sees him in Victor, at Victor's age. Try to sleep.'

'I do. I pray that you may.'

Silence courted slumber. Their interchange of speech from the posture of bodies on their backs, had been low and deliberate, in the tone of the vaults. Dead silence recalled the strangeness of it. The night was breathless; their open window a peril bestowing

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

no boon. They were mutually haunted by sound of the gloomy query at the nostrils of each when drawing the vital breath. But for that, they thought they might have slept.

Bed spake to bed:

'The words of Mr. Stuart Rem last Sunday!'

'He said: "Be just." Could one but see direction!'

'In obscurity, feeling is a guide.'

'The heart.'

'It may sometimes be followed.'

'When it concerns the family.'

'He would have the living, who are seeking peace, be just.'

'Not to assume the seat of justice.'

Again they lay as tombstone effigies, that have committed the passage of affairs to another procession of the Ages.

There was a gentle sniff, in hopeless confirmation of the experience of its predecessors. A sister to it ensued.

'Could Victor have spoken so, without assurance in his conscience, that his entreaty was righteously addressed to us? that we . . .'

'And no others!'

'I think of his language. He loves the child.'

'In heart as in mind, he is eminently gifted; acknowledgeing error.'

'He was very young.'

The huge funereal minutes conducted their sonorous hearse, the hour.

It struck in the bedroom Three.

No more than three of the clock, it was the voice telling of half the precious restorative nighthours wasted.

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

Now, as we close our eyelids when we would go to sleep, so must we, in expectation of the peace of mind granting us the sweet oblivion, preliminarily do something which invokes, that we may obtain it.

'Dear,' Dorothea said.

'I know indeed,' said Virginia.

'We may have been!'

'Not designingly.'

'Indeed not. But harsh it may be named, if the one innocent is to be the sufferer.'

'The child can in no sense be adjudged guilty.'

'It is Victor's child.'

'He adores the child.'

Wheels were in mute motion within them; and presently the remark was tossed-up:

'In his coming to us, it is possible to see paternal solicitude.'

Thence came fruit of reflection:

'To be instrumental as guides to a tender young life!'

Reflection heated with visions:

'Once our dream!'

They had the happier feeling of composure, though Tasso possessed the room. Not Tasso, but a sublimated offensiveness, issue of the antagonistically combined, dispersed to be the more penetrating; insomuch that it seemed to them they could not ever again make use of *eau d'Arquebusade* without the vitiating reminder. So true were the words of Mr. Stuart Rem: 'Half measures to purification are the most delusive of our artifices.' Fatigue and its reflections helped to be peacefuller. Their souls were mounting to a serenity above the nauseating degradation, to which the poor little dog had dragged them.

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

'Victor gave his promise.'

'At least, concession would not imply contact with the guilty.'

Both sighed as they took-up the burden of the vaporous Tasso to drop him; with the greater satisfaction in the expelling of their breath.

'It might be said, dear, that concession to his entreaty does not in any way countenance the sin.'

'I can see, dear, how it might be read as a reproof.'

Their exchange of sentences followed meditative pauses; Dorothea leading.

'To one so sensitive as Victor!'

'A month or two of our society for the child!'

'It is not the length of time.'

'The limitation assures against maternal claims.'

'She would not dare.'

'He used the words: "her serious respect" for us. I should not wish to listen to him often.'

'We listen to a higher.'

'It may really be, that the child is like him.'

'Not resembling Mr. Stuart Rem's Clementina!'

'A week of that child gave us our totally sleepless night.'

'One thinks more hopefully of a child of Victor's.'

'He would preponderate.'

'He would.'

They sighed; but it was now with the relief of a lightened oppression.

'If, dear, in truth the father's look is in the child, he has the greater reason to desire for her a taste of our atmosphere.'

'Do not pursue it. Sleep.'

'One prayer!'

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

'Your mention of our atmosphere, dear, destroys my power to frame one. Do you, for two. But I would cleanse my heart.'

'There is none purer.'

'Hush.'

Virginia spoke a more fervent word of praise of her sister, and had not the hushing response to it. She heard the soft regular breathing. Her own was in downy fellowship with it a moment later.

At the hour of nine, in genial daylight, sitting over the crumbs of his hotel breakfast, Victor received a little note that bore the handwriting of Dorothea Duvidney.

'Dear Victor, we are prepared to receive the child for a month. In haste, before your train. Our love.

'D. and V.'

His face flashed out of cloud.

A more precious document had never been handed to him. It chased back to midnight the doubt hovering over his belief in himself:—phrased to say, that he was no longer the Victor Radnor known to the world. And it extinguished a corpse-light recollection of a baleful dream in the night. Here shone radiant witness of his being the very man; save for the spot of his recent confusion in distinguishing his identity or in feeling that he stood whole and solid.—Because of two mature maiden ladies? Yes, because of two maiden ladies, my good fellow. And friend Colney, you know the ladies, and what the getting round *them* for one's purposes really means.

The sprite of Colney Durance had struck him smartly overnight. Victor's internal crow was over

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CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Ladies' Lapdog Tasso for an Instance of Momentous Effects produced by very Minor Causes

Colney now. And when you have the optimist and pessimist acutely opposed in a mixing group, they direct lively conversations at one another across the gulf of distance, even of time. For a principle is involved, besides the knowledge of the other's triumph or dismay. The couple are scales of a balance; and not before last night had Victor ever consented to think of Colney ascending while he dropped low to graze the pebbles.

He left his hotel for the station, singing the great aria of the fourth Act of the *Favorita*: neglected since that mighty German with his *Rienzi*, and *Tannhäuser*, and *Tristan and Isolda*, had mastered him, to the displacement of his boyhood's beloved sugary *-inis* and *-antes* and *-zettis*; had clearly mastered, not beguiled, him; had wafted him up to a new realm, invigorating if severer. But now his youth would have its voice. He travelled up to town with Sir Abraham Quatley, and talked, and took and gave hints upon City and Commercial affairs, while the honeyed Italian of the conventional, gloriously animal, stress and flutter had a revel in his veins, now and then mutedly ebullient at the mouth: honeyed, golden, rich in visions;—having surely much more of Nature's encouragement to her children?

CHAPTER XXIV

Nesta's Engagement

A word in his ear from Fenellan, touching that man Blathenoy, set the wheels of Victor's brain at work upon his defences, for a minute, on the walk West-

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CHAPTER XXIV Nesta's Engagement

ward. Who knew?—who did not know! He had a torpid consciousness that he cringed to the world, with an entreaty to the great monster to hold off in ignorance; and the next instant, he had caught its miserable spies by the lurcher neck and was towering. He dwelt on his contempt of them, to curtain the power they could stir.

'The little woman, you say, took to Dartrey?'

Fenellan, with the usual apologetic moderation of a second statement, thought 'there was the look of it.'

'Well, we must watch over her. Dartrey!—but Dartrey's an honest fellow with women. But men are men. Very few men spare a woman when the mad fit is on her. A little woman—pretty little woman!—wife to Jacob Blathenoy! She mustn't at her age have any close choosing—under her hand. And Dartrey's just the figure to strike a spark in a tinder-box head.'

'With a husband who'd reduce Minerva's to tinder, after a month of him!'

'He spent his honeymoon at his place at Wrensham; told me so.' Blathenoy had therefore then heard of the building of Lakelands by the Victor Radnor of the City; and had then, we guess—in the usual honeymoon boasting of a windbag with his bride—wheezed the foul gossip, to hide his emptiness and do duty for amusement of the pretty little caged bird. Probably so. But Victor knew that Blathenoy needed him and feared him. Probably the wife had been enjoined to keep silence; for the Blachingtons, Fannings and others were, it could be sworn, blank and unscratched folio sheets on the subject:—as yet; unless Mrs. Burman had dropped venom.

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'One pities the little woman, eh, Fenellan?'

'Dartrey won't be back for a week or so; and they're off to Switzerland, after the dinner they give. I heard from him this morning; one of the Clanconans is ill.'

'Lucky. But wherever Blathenoy takes her, he must be the same "arid bore," as old Colney says.'

'A domestic simoom,' said Fenellan, booming it: and Victor had a shudder.

'Awful thing, marriage, to some women! We chain them to that domestic round; most of them haven't the means of independence or a chance of winning it; and all that's open to them, if they've made a bad cast for a mate—and good Lord! how are they to know before it's too late!—they haven't a choice except to play tricks or jump to the deuce or sit and "drape in blight," as Colney has it; though his notion of the optional marriages, broken or renewed every seven years!—if he means it. You never know, with him. It sounds like another squirt of savage irony. It's donkey nonsense, eh?'

'The very hee-haw of nonsense,' Fenellan acquiesced.

'Come, come; read your Scriptures; donkeys have shown wisdom,' Victor said, rather leaning to the theme of a fretfulness of women in the legal yoke. 'They're donkeys till we know them for prophets. Who can tell! Colney may be hailed for one fifty years hence.'

Fenellan was not invited to enter the house, although the loneliness of his lodgeings was known, and also, that he played whist at his Club. Victor had grounds for turning to him at the door and

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CHAPTER XXIV Nesta's Engagement

squeezing his hand warmly, by way of dismissal. In ascribing them to a weariness at Fenellan's perpetual acquiescence, he put the cover on them, and he stamped it with a repudiation of the charge, that Colney's views upon the great Marriage Question were the 'very hee-haw of nonsense.' They were not the hee-haw; in fact, viewing the host of marriages, they were for discussion; there was no bray about them. He could not feel them to be absurd while Mrs. Burman's tenure of existence barred the ceremony. Anything for a phrase! he murmured of Fenellan's talk; calling him, Dear old boy, to soften the slight.

Nataly had not seen Fenellan or heard from Dartrey; so she continued to be uninformed of her hero's release; and that was in the order of happy accidents. She had hardly to look her interrogation for the news; it radiated. But he stated such matter-of-course briefly. 'The good ladies are ready to receive our girl.'

Her chagrin resolved to a kind of solace of her draggled pride, in the idea, that he who tamed everybody to submission, might well have command of her.

The note, signed D. and V., was shown.

There stood the words. And last night she had been partly of the opinion of Colney Durance. She sank down among the unreasoning abject;—not this time with her perfect love of him, but with a resistance and a dubiety under compression. For she had not quite comprehended why Nesta should go. This readiness of the Duvidney ladies to receive the girl, stopped her mental inquiries.

She begged for a week's delay; 'before the part-

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ing'; as her dear old silly mother's pathos whimpered it, of the separation for a month! and he smiled and hummed pleasantly at any small petition, thinking her in error to expect Dartrey's return to town before the close of a week; and then wondering at women, mildly denouncing in his heart the mothers who ran risk of disturbing their daughters' bosoms with regard to particular heroes married or not. Dartrey attracted women: he was one of the men who do it without effort. Victor's provident mind blamed the mother for the indiscreetness of her wish to have him among them. But Dudley had been making way bravely of late; he improved; he began to bloom, like a Spring flower of the garden protected from frosts under glass; and Fredi was the sheltering and nourishing bestower of the lessons. One could see, his questions and other little points revealed, that he had a certain lover's dread of Dartrey Fenellan; a sort of jealousy: Victor understood the feeling. To love a girl, who has her ideal of a man elsewhere in another; though she may know she never can wed the man, and has not the hope of it; is torment to the lover quailing, as we do in this terrible season of the priceless deliciousness, stripped against all the winds that blow; skinless at times. One gets up a sympathy for the poor shy dependent shivering lover. Nevertheless, here was young Dudley waking, visibly becoming bolder. As in the flute-duets, he gained fire from concert. The distance between Cronidge and Moorsedge was two miles and a quarter.

Instead of the delay of a whole week, Victor granted four days, which embraced a musical evening at Mrs. John Cormyn's on the last of the days,

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CHAPTER XXIV
Nesta's Engagement

when Nesta was engaged to sing with her mother a duet of her own composition, the first public fruit of her lessons in counterpoint from rigid Herr Sträuscher, who had said what he had said, in letting it pass: eulogy, coming from him. So Victor heard, and he doated on the surprise to come for him, in a boyish anticipation. The girl's little French ballads under tutelage of Louise de Seilles promised, though they were imitative. If Sträuscher let this pass . . . Victor saw Grand Opera somewhere to follow; England's claim to be a creative musical nation vindicated; and the genius of the fair sex as well.

He heard the duet at Mrs. Cormyn's; and he imagined a hearing of his Fredi's Opera, and her godmother's delight in it; the once-famed Sanfredini's consent to be the *diva* at a rehearsal, and then her compelling her hidalgo *duque* to consent further: an event not inconceivable. For here was downright genius; the flowering aloe of the many years in formation; and Colney admitted the song to have a streak of genius; though he would pettishly and stupidly say, that our modern newspaper Press is able now to force genius for us twenty or so to the month, excluding Sundays—our short pauses for the incubation of it. Real rare genius was in that song, nothing forced; and exquisite melody; one of those melodies which fling gold chains about us and lead us off, lead us back into Eden. Victor hummed at bars of it on the drive homeward. His darlings had to sing it again in the half-lighted drawing-room. The bubble-happiness of the three was vexed only by tidings heard from Colney during

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CHAPTER XXIV Nesta's Engagement

the evening of a renewed instance of Skepsey's misconduct. Priscilla Graves had hurried away to him at the close of Mr. John Cormyn's Concert, in consequence; in grief and in sympathy. Skepsey was to appear before the magistrate next morning, for having administered physical chastisement to his wife during one of her fits of drunkenness. Colney had seen him. His version of the story was given, however, in the objectional humorous manner: none could gather from it of what might be pleaded for Skepsey. His 'lesson to his wife in the art of pugilism, before granting her Captain's rank among the Defensive Amazons of Old England,' was the customary patent absurdity. But it was odd, that Skepsey always preferred his appeal for help to Colney Durance. Nesta proposed following Priscilla that night. She had hinted her wish, on the way home; she was urgent, beseeching, when her father lifted praises of her: she had to start with her father by the train at seven in the morning, and she could not hear of poor Skepsey for a number of hours. She begged a day's delay; which would enable her, she said, to join them in dining at the Blachington's, and seeing dear Lakelands again. 'I was invited, you know.' She spoke in childish style, and under her eyes she beheld her father and mother exchange looks. He had a fear that Nataly might support the girl's petition. Nataly read him to mean, possible dangers among the people at Wrensham. She had seemed hesitating. After meeting Victor's look, her refusal was firm. She tried to make it one of distress for the use of the hard word to her own dear girl. Nesta spied beneath.

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CHAPTER XXIV Nesta's Engagement

But what was it? There was a reason for her going! She had a right to stay, and see and talk with Captain Dartrey, and she was to be deported!

So now she set herself to remember little incidents at Creckholt: particularly a conversation in a very young girl's hearing, upon Sir Humphrey and Lady Pottil's behaviour to the speakers, her parents. She had then, and she now had, an extraordinary feeling, as from a wind striking upon soft summer weather off regions of ice, that she was in her parents' way. How? The feeling was irrational; it could give her no reply, or only the multitudinous which are the question violently repeated. She slept on it.

She and her father breakfasted by the London birds' first twitter. They talked of Skepsey. She spoke of her going as exile. 'No,' said he, 'you're sure to meet friends.'

Her cheeks glowed. It came wholly through the suddenness of the recollection, that the family-seat of one among the friends was near the Wells.

He was allowed to fancy, as it suited him to fancy, that a vivid secret pleasure laid the colour on those ingenuous fair cheeks.

'A solitary flute for me, for a month! I shall miss my sober comrade: got the habit of duetting: and he's gentle, bears with me.'

Tears lined her eyelids. 'Who would not be, dearest dada! But there is nothing to bear except the honour.'

'You like him? You and I always have the same tastes, Fredi.'

Now there was a reddening of the sun at the mount; all the sky aflame. How could he know that it was

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not the heart in the face! She reddened because she had perused his wishes; had detected a scheme striking off from them, and knew a man to be the object of it; and because she had at the same time the sense of a flattery in her quick divination; and she was responsively emotional, her blood virginal; often it was a tropical lightning.

It looked like the heart doing rich painter's work on maiden features. Victor was naturally as deceived as he wished to be.

From his being naturally so, his remarks on Dudley had an air of embracing him as one of the family. 'His manner to me just hits me.'

'I like to see him with you,' she said.

Her father let his tongue run: 'One of the few young men I feel perfectly at home with! I do like dealing with a gentleman. I can confide in a gentleman: honour, heart, whatever I hold dearest.'

There he stopped, not too soon. The girl was mute, fully agreeing, slightly hardening. She had a painful sense of separation from her dear Louise. And it was now to be from her mother as well: she felt the pain when kissing her mother in bed. But this was moderated by the prospect of a holiday away out of reach of Mr. Barmby's pursuing voice, whom her mother favoured: and her mother was concealing something from her; so she could not make the confidante of her mother. Nataly had no forewarnings. Her simple regrets filled her bosom. All night she had been taking her chastisement, and in the morning it seemed good to her, that she should be denuded, for her girl to learn the felicity of having relatives.

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CHAPTER XXIV Nesta's Engagement

For some reason, over which Nataly mused in the succeeding hours, the girl had not spoken of any visit her mother was to pay to the Duvidney ladies or they to her. Latterly she had not alluded to her mother's family. It might mean, that the beloved and dreaded was laying finger on a dark thing in the dark; reading syllables by touch; keeping silence over the communications to a mind not yet actively speculative, as it is a way with young women. 'With young women educated for the market, to be timorous, consequently secretive, rather snaky,' Colney Durance had said. Her Nesta was not one of the 'framed and glazed' description, cited by him, for an example of the triumph of the product; 'exactly harmonious with the ninny male's ideal of female innocence.' No; but what if the mother had opened her heart to her girl? It had been of late her wish or a dream, shaping hourly to a design, now positively to go through that furnace. Her knowledge of Victor's objection, restrained an impulse that had not won spring enough to act against his counsel or vivify an intelligence grown dull in slavery under him, with regard to the one seeming right course. The adoption of it would have wounded him—therefore her. She had thought of him first; she had also thought of herself, and she blamed herself now. She went so far as to think, that Victor was guilty of the schemer's error of counting human creatures arithmetically, in the sum, without the estimate of distinctive qualities and value here and there. His return to a shivering sensitiveness on the subject of his girl's enlightenment 'just yet,' for which Nataly pitied and loved him, sharing it, with humiliation for doing so, became finally her excuse.

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We must have some excuse, if we would keep to life.

Skepsey's case appeared in the evening papers. He confessed, 'frankly,' he said, to the magistrate, that, 'acting under temporary exasperation, he had lost for a moment a man's proper self-command.' He was as frank in stating, that he 'occupied the prisoner's place before his Worship a second time, and was a second time indebted to the gentleman, Mr. Colney Durance, who so kindly stood by him.' There was hilarity in the Court at his quaint sententious envelopment of the idiom of the streets, which he delivered with solemnity: 'He could only plead, not in absolute justification—an appeal to human sentiments—the feelings of a man of the humbler orders, returning home in the evening, and his thoughts upon things not without their importance, to find repeatedly the guardian of his household beastly drunk, and destructive.' Colney made the case quite intelligible to the magistrate; who gravely robed a strain of the idiomatic in the officially awful, to keep in tune with his delinquent. No serious harm had been done to the woman. Skepsey was admonished and released. His wife expressed her willingness to forgive him, now he had got his lesson; and she hoped he would understand, that there was no need for a woman to learn pugilism. Skepsey would have explained; but the case was over, he was hustled out.

However, a keen young reporter present smelt fun for copy; he followed the couple; and in a particular evening Journal, laughable matter was printed concerning Skepsey's view of the pugilism to be imparted to women for their physical protection in extremity,

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CHAPTER XXIV Nesta's Engagement

and the distinction of it from the blow conveying the moral lesson to them; his wife having objected to the former, because it annoyed her and he pestered her; and she was never, she said, ready to stand up to him for practice, as he called it, except when she had taken more than he thought wholesome for her:—he had no sense. There was a squabble between them, because he chose to scour away to his master's office instead of conducting her home with the honours. Nesta read the young reporter's version, with shrieks. She led the ladies of Moorsedge to discover amusement in it.

At first, as her letter to her mother described them, they were like a pair of pieces of costly China, with the settled smile, and cold. She saw but the outside of them, and she continued reporting the variations, which steadily determined to warmth. On the night of the third day, they kissed her tenderly; they were human figures.

No one could be aware of the trial undergone by the good ladies in receiving her: Victor's child; but, as their phrase would have run, had they dared to give it utterance to one another, a child of sin. How foreign to them, in that character, how strange, when she was looked on as an inhabitant of their house, they hardly dared to estimate; until the timorous estimation, from gradually swelling, suddenly sank; nature invaded them; they could discard the alienating sense of the taint; and not only did they no longer fear the moment when Mr. Stuart Rem or Mr. Posterley might call for evening tea, but they consulted upon inviting the married one of those gentlemen, 'to divert dear Nesta.' Every night she slept well. In all she did, she proved

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she was 'of the blood.' She had Victor's animated eyes; she might have, they dreaded to think, his eloquence. They put it down to his eloquence entirely, that their resistance to his petition had been overcome, for similarly with the treatment of the private acts of royal personages by lacquey History, there is, in the minds of the ultra-civilized, an insistence, that any event having a consequence in matters personal to them, be at all hazards recorded with the utmost nicety in decency. By such means, they preserve the ceremonial self-respect, which is a necessity of their existence; and so they maintain the regal elevation over the awe-struck subjects of their interiors; who might otherwise revolt, pull down, scatter, dishonour, expose for a shallow fiction the holiest, the most vital to them. A democratic evil spirit is abroad, generated among congregations, often perilously communicating its wanton laughter to the desperate wickedness they know (not solely through the monition of Mr. Stuart Rem) to lurk within. It has to be excluded: on certain points they must not think. The night of Tasso was darkly clouded in the minds of the pure ladies: a rift would have seized their half-slumbering sense of smell, to revive the night, perhaps disorder the stately march of their intelligences.

Victor's eloquence, Victor's influence, Victor's child: he carried them as a floodstream, insomuch, that their reception of this young creature of the blot on her birth, was regarded by them in the unmentioned abstract, and the child's presence upon earth seen with the indulgence (without the naughty curiosity) of the loyal moral English for the numerous offspring of the peccadillos of their monarchs. These things

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CHAPTER XXIV Nesta's Engagement

pass muster from being 'Britannically cocooned in the purple,' says our irreverent satirist; and the maiden ladies' passion of devotion to 'the blood' helped to blind them; but still more so did the imperious urgency to curtain closely the night of Tasso, throwing all its consequences upon Victor's masterful tongue. Whence it ensued (and here is the danger for illogical individuals as well as vast communities, who continue to batten upon fiction when the convenience of it has taken the place of pleasure), that they had need to exalt his eloquence, for a cloak to their conduct; and doing it, they fell into a habit of yielding to him; they disintegrated under him; rules, principles, morality, were shaken to some confusion. And still proceeding thus, they now and then glanced back, more wonderingly than convicted sinners upon their days of early innocence, at the night when successfully they withstood him. They who had doubted of the rightness of letting Victor's girl come into collision with two clerical gentlemen, one of whom was married, permitted him now to bring the Hon. Dudley Sowerby to their house, and make appointments to meet Mr. Dudley Sowerby under a roof that sheltered a young lady, evidently the allurement to the scion of aristocracy; of whose family Mr. Stuart Rem had spoken in the very kindling hushed tones, proper to the union of a sacerdotal and an English citizen's veneration.

How would it end? And if some day this excellent Mr. Dudley Sowerby reproached them! He could not have a sweeter bride, one more truly a lady in education and manners; but the birth! the child's name! Their trouble was emitted in a vapour of interjections.

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CHAPTER XXIV Nesta's Engagement

Very perplexing was it for the good ladies of strict principles to reflect, as dimly they did, that the concrete presence of dear Nesta silenced and overcame objections to her being upon earth. She seemed, as it were, a draught of redoubtable Nature inebriating morality. But would others be similarly affected? Victor might get his release, to do justice to the mother: it would not cover the child. Prize as they might the quality of the Radnor blood (drawn from the most ancient of original Britain's princes), there was also the Cantor blood for consideration; and it was old, noble, proud. Would it be satisfied in matching itself with great wealth, a radiant health, and the good looks of a young flower? For the sake of the dear girl, the ladies hoped that it would; and they enlarged the outline of their wedding present, while, in their minds, the noble English family which could be satisfied so, was lowered, partaking of the taint they had personally ceased to recognize.

Of one thing they were sure, and it enlisted them: the gentleman loved the girl. Her love of him, had it been prominent to view, would have stirred a feminine sigh, not more, except a feminine lecture to follow. She was quite uninflamed, fresh and cool as a spring. His ardour had no disguise. They measured him by the favourite fiction's heroes of their youth, and found him to gaze, talk, comport himself, according to the prescription; correct grammar, finished sentences, all that is expected of a gentleman enamoured; and ever with the watchful intentness for his lady's faintest first dawn of an inclining to a wish. Mr. Dudley Sowerby's eye upon Nesta was really an apprentice. There is in

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CHAPTER XXIV Nesta's Engagement

Love's young season a magnanimity in the male kind. Their superior strength and knowledge are made subservient to the distaff of the weaker and shallower: they crown her queen; her look is their mandate. So was it when Sir Charles and Sir Rupert and the estimable Villiers Davenant touched maidenly hearts to throb: so is it now, with the Hon. Dudley Sowerby.

Very haltingly, the ladies were guilty of a suggestion to Victor. 'Oh! Fredi?' said he; 'admires her, no doubt; and so do I, so we all do; she's one of the nice girls; but as to Cupid's darts, she belongs to the cucumber family, and he shoots without fireing. We shall do the mischief if we put an interdict. Don't you remember the green days when obstacles were the friction to light that match?' Their pretty nod of assent displayed the virgin pride of the remembrance: they dreamed of having once been exceedingly wilful; it refreshed their nipped natures; and dwelling on it, they forgot to press their suggestion. Incidentally, he named the sum his Fredi would convey to her husband; with, as was calculable, the further amount his only child would inherit. A curious effect was produced on them. Though they were not imaginatively mercenary, as the creatures tainted with wealth commonly are, they talked of the sum over and over in the solitude of their chamber. 'Dukes have married for less.' Such an heiress, they said, might buy up a Principality. Victor had supplied them with something of an apology to the gentleman proposing to Nesta in their house.

The chronicle of it is, that Dudley Sowerby did this on the fifteenth day of September; and that it was

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not known to the damsel's parents before the twenty-third; as they were away on an excursion in South Tyrol:—away, flown, with just a word of the hurried departure to their envious, exiled girl; though they did not tell her of new constructions at the London house partly causing them to fly. Subject to their consent, she wrote, she had given hers. The letter was telegramic on the essential point. She wrote of Mr. Barmby's having visited Mr. Posterley at the Wells, and she put it just as flatly. Her principal concern, to judge by her writing, was, to know what Mr. Durance had done, during her absence, with the group of emissary advocates of the various tongues of Europe on board the steam-Liner conducting them the first stage of their journey to the Court of Japan.

Mr. Simeon Fenellan had written his opinion, that all these delegates of the different European nationalities were nothing other than dupes of a New-York Syndicate of American Humorists, not without an eye on the mainchance; and he was sure they would be set to debate publicly, before an audience of high-priced tickets, in the principal North American Cities, previous to the embarcation for Japan at San Francisco. Mr. Fenellan eulogized the immense astuteness of Dr. Gannius in taking his daughter Delphica with him. Dr. Gannius had singled forth poor Dr. Bouthoin for the object of his attacks; but Nesta was chiefly anxious to hear of Delphica's proceedings; she was immensely interested in Delphica, and envied her; and the girl's funny speculations over the play of Delphica's divers arts upon the Greek, and upon the Russian, and upon the English curate Mr. Semhians, and upon M. Falarique—set Gallically pluming and

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CHAPTER XXIV Nesta's Engagement

crowing out of an Alsace-Lorraine growl—were clever. Only, in such a letter, they were amazing.

Nataly received it at Campiglio, when about to start for an excursion down the Sarca Valley to Arco. Her letter of reply was delayed. One to Victor from Dudley Sowerby, awaited them, on their return. 'Confirms Fredi,' he said, showing it, and praising it as commendable, properly fervid. She made pretence to read, she saw the words.

Her short beat of wings was over. She had joined herself with Victor's leap for a change, thirsting for the scenery of the white peaks in heaven, to enjoy through his enjoyment, if her own capacity was dead: and she had found it revive, up to some recovery of her old songful readiness for invocations of pleasure. Escape and beauty beckoned ahead; behind were the chains. These two letters of the one fact plucked her back. The chained body bore the fluttering spirit: or it was the spirit in bonds, that dragged the body. Both were abashed before the image of her girl. Out of the riddle of her strange Nesta, one thing was clear: she did not love the man: and Nataly tasted gladness in that, from the cup of poisonous regrets at the thought. Her girl's heart would not be broken. But if he so strongly loved her, as to hold to this engagement? . . . It might then be worse. She dropped a plumb-line into the young man, sounding him by what she knew of him and judged. She had to revert to Nesta's charm, for the assurance of his anchored attachment.

Her holiday took the burden of her trouble, and amid the beauty of a disenchanted scene, she resumed the London incubus.

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'You told him of her being at the Wells? in the neighbourhood, Victor?'

'Didn't you know, my dear, the family-seat is Cronidge, two miles out from the Wells?—and particularly pretty country.'

'I had forgotten, if I ever heard. You will not let him be in ignorance?'

'My dear love, you are pale about it. This is a matter between men. I write, thanking for the honour and so forth; and I appoint an interview; and I show him my tablets. He must be told, necessarily. Incidents of this kind come in their turn. If Dudley does not account himself the luckiest young fellow in the kingdom, he's not worthy of his good fortune. I wish they were both here now, honeymooning among these peaks, seeing the crescent over one, as we did last night!'

'Have you an idea, in reading Nesta's letter?'

'Seems indifferent?—mere trick to hide the blushes. And I, too, I'm interested in Delphica. Delphica and Falarique will be fine stage business. Of course, Dr. Bouthoin and his curate!—we know what Old England has to expect from Colney.'

'At any rate, Mr. Durance hurts no one. You will, in your letter, appoint the day of the interview?'

'Hurts himself! Yes, dearest; appoint for—ten days homeward—eleventh day from to-day. And you to Fredi: a bit of description — as you can, my Nataly! Happy to be a dolomite, to be painted by Nataly's pen.'

The sign is evil, when we have a vexatious ringing in the ear of some small piece of familiar domestic

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CHAPTER XXIV Nesta's Engagement

chatter, and subject it to scrutiny, hang on it, worry and magnify it. What will not creatures under sway of the sensational life, catch at to emphasize and strengthen distaste, until distaste shall have a semblance of reason, in the period of the mind's awakening to revolt! Nataly shrank from the name of dolomite, detested the name, though the scenes regained their beauty or something of it beneath her showery vision. Every time Victor spoke of dolomites on the journey homeward, she had at heart an accusation of her cowardice, her duplicity, frailty, treachery to the highest of her worship and sole support of her endurance in the world: not much blaming him: but the degrading view of herself sank them both. On a shifty soil, down goes the idol. For him she could plead still, for herself she could not.

The smell of the Channel brine inspirited her sufficiently to cast off the fit and make it seem, in the main, a bodily depression; owing to causes, of which she was beginning to have an apprehensive knowledge: and they were not so fearful to her as the gloom they displaced.

CHAPTER XXV

Nataly in Action

A tucket of herald newspapers told the world of Victor's returning to his London. Pretty Mrs. Blathenoy was Nataly's first afternoon visitor, and was graciously received; no sign of inquiry for the cause of the lady's alacrity to greet her being shown.

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CHAPTER XXV Nataly in Action

Colney Durance came in, bringing the rumour of an Australian cantatrice to kindle Europe; Mr. Peridon, a seeker of tidings from the city of Bourges; Miss Priscilla Graves, reporting of Skepsey, in a holiday Sunday tone, that his alcoholic partner might at any moment release him; Mr. Septimus Barmby, with a hanged heavy look, suggestive of a wharfside crane swinging the ponderous thing he had to say. 'I have seen Miss Radnor.'

'She was well?' the mother asked, and the grand basso pitched forth an affirmative.

'Dear sweet girl she is!' Mrs. Blathenoy exclaimed to Colney.

He bowed. 'Very sweet. And can let fly on you, like a haggis, for a scratch.'

She laughed, glad of an escape from the conversational formalities imposed on her by this Mrs. Victor Radnor's mighty manner. 'But what girl worth anything . . .! We all can do that, I hope, for a scratch!'

Mr. Barmby's Profession dissented.

Mr. Catkin appeared; ten minutes after his Peridon. He had met Victor near the Exchange, and had left him humming the *non fù sogno* of ERNANI.

'Ah, when Victor takes to Verdi, it's a flat City, and wants a burst of drum and brass,' Colney said; and he hummed a few bars of the march in Attila, and shrugged. He and Victor had once admired that blatancy.

Mr. Pempton appeared, according to anticipation. He sat himself beside Priscilla. Entered Mrs. John Cormyn, voluminous; Mrs. Peter Yatt, effervescent; Nataly's own people were about her and she felt at home.

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CHAPTER XXV Nataly in Action

Mrs. Blathenoy pushed a small thorn into it, by speaking of Captain Fenellan, and aside, as if sharing him with her. Nataly heard that Dartrey had been the guest of these Blathenoys. Even Dartrey was but a man!

Rather lower under her voice, the vain little creature asked: 'You knew her?'

'Her?'

The cool counter-interrogation was disregarded. 'So sad! In the desert! a cup of pure water worth more than barrow-loads of gold! Poor woman!'

'Who?'

'His wife.'

'Wife!'

'They were married?'

Nataly could have cried: Snake! Her play at brevity had certainly been foiled. She nodded gravely. A load of dusky wonders and speculations pressed at her bosom. She disdained to question the mouth which had bitten her.

Mrs. Blathenoy, resolving, that despite the jealousy she excited, she would have her friend in Captain Fenellan, whom she liked—liked, she was sure, quite as innocently as any other woman of his acquaintance did, departed: and she hugged her innocence defiantly, with the mournful pride which will sometimes act as a solvent.

A remark or two passed among the company upon her pretty face.

Nataly murmured to Colney: 'Is there anything of Dartrey's wife?'

'Dead,' he answered.

'When?'

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'Months back. I had it from Simeon. You didn't hear?'

She shook her head. Her ears buzzed. If he had it from Simeon Fenellan, Victor must have known it.

Her duties of hostess were conducted with the official smile.

As soon as she stood alone, she dropped on a chair, like one who has taken a shot in the heart, and that hideous tumult of wild cries at her ears blankly ceased. Dartrey, Victor, Nesta, were shifting figures of the might-have-been: for whom a wretched erring woman, washed clean of her guilt by death, in a far land, had gone to her end: vainly gone: and now another was here, a figure of wood, in man's shape, conjured up by one of the three, to divide the two others; likely to be fatal to her or to them: to her, she hoped, if the choice was to be: and beneath the leaden hope, her heart set to a rapid beating, a fainter, a chill at the core.

She snatched for breath. She shut her eyes, and with open lips, lay waiting; prepared to thank the kindness about to hurry her hence, out of the seas of pain, without pain.

Then came sighs. The sad old servant in her bosom was resuming his labours.

But she had been near it—very near it? A gush of pity for Victor, overwhelmed her hardness of mind.

Unreflectingly, she tried her feet to support her, and tottered to the door, touched along to the stairs, and descended them, thinking strangely upon such a sudden weakness of body, when she would no longer have thought herself the weak woman. Her aim was to reach the library. She sat on the stairs midway,

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CHAPTER XXV Nataly in Action

pondering over the length of her journey: and now her head was clearer; for she was travelling to get Railway-guides, and might have had them from the hands of a footman, and imagined that she had considered it prudent to hide her investigation of those books: proofs of an understanding fallen backward to the state of infant and having to begin our drear ascent again.

A slam of the kitchen stair-door restored her. She betrayed no infirmity of footing as she walked past Arlington in the hall; and she was alive to the voice of Skepsey presently on the door-steps. Arlington brought her a note.

Victor had written: 'My love, I dine with Blathenoy in the City, at the Walworth. Business. Skepsey for clothes. Eight of us. Formal. A thousand embraces. Late.'

Skepsey was ushered in. His wife had expired at noon, he said; and he postured decorously the grief he could not feel, knowing that a lady would expect it of him. His wife had fallen down stone steps; she died in hospital. He wished to say, she was no loss to the country; but he was advised within of the prudence of abstaining from comment and trusting to his posture, and he squeezed a drop of conventional sensibility out of it, and felt improved.

Nataly sent a line to Victor: 'Dearest, I go to bed early, am tired. Dine well. Come to me in the morning.'

She reproached herself for coldness to poor Skepsey, when he had gone. The prospect of her being alone until the morning had been so absorbing a relief.

She found a relief also in work at the book of the

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CHAPTER XXV Nataly in Action

trains. A walk to the telegraph-station strengthened her. Especially after despatching a telegram to Mr. Dudley Sowerby at Cronidge, and one to Nesta at Moorsedge, did she become stoutly nerved. The former was requested to meet her at Penshurst station at noon. Nesta was to be at the station for the Wells at three o'clock.

From the time of the flying of these telegrams, up to the tap of Victor's knuckle on her bedroom door next morning, she was not more reflectively conscious than a packet travelling to its destination by pneumatic tube. Nor was she acutely impressionable to the features and the voice she loved.

'You know of Skepsey?' she said.

'Ah, poor Skepsey!' Victor frowned and heaved.

'One of us ought to stand beside him at the funeral.'

'Colney or Fenellan?'

'I will ask Mr. Durance.'

'Do, my darling.'

'Victor, you did not tell me of Dartrey's wife.'

'There again! They all get released! Yes, Dartrey! Dartrey has his luck too.'

She closed her eyes, with the desire to be asleep.

'You should have told me, dear.'

'Well, my love! Well—poor Dartrey! I fancy I hadn't a confirmation of the news. I remember a horrible fit of envy on hearing the hint: not much more than a hint: serious illness, was it?—or expected event. Hardly worth while to trouble my dear soul, till certain. Anything about wives, forces me to think of myself—my better self!'

'I had to hear of it first from Mrs. Blathenoy.'

'You've heard of duels in dark rooms:—that was

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CHAPTER XXV Nataly in Action

the case between Blathenoy and me last night for an hour.'

She feigned somnolent fatigue over her feverish weariness of heart. He kissed her on the forehead.

Her spell-bound intention to speak of Dudley Sowerby to him, was broken by the sounding of the hall-door, thirty minutes later. She had lain in a trance.

Life surged to her with the thought, that she could decide and take her step. Many were the years back since she had taken a step; less independently then than now; unregretted, if fatal. Her brain was heated for the larger view of things and the swifter summing of them. It could put the man at a remove from her and say, that she had lived with him and suffered intensely. It gathered him to her breast rejoicing in their union: the sharper the scourge, the keener the exultation. But she had one reproach to deafen and beat down. This did not come on her from the world: she and the world were too much foot to foot on the antagonist's line, for her to listen humbly. It came of her quick summary survey of him, which was unnoticed by the woman's present fiery mind as being new or strange in any way: simply it was a fact she now read; and it directed her to reproach herself for an abasement beneath his leadership, a blind subserviency and surrender of her faculties to his greater powers, such as no soul of a breathing body should yield to man: not to the highest, not to the Titan, not to the most Godlike of men. Under cloak, they demand it. They demand their bane.

And Victor! . . . She had seen into him.

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The reproach on her was, that she, in her worship, had been slave, not helper. Scarcely was she irreproachable in the character of slave. If it had been but *utter* slave! she phrased the words, for a further reproach. She remembered having at times murmured, dissented. And it would have been a desperate proud thought to comfort a slave, that never once had she known even a secret opposition to the will of her lord.

But she had: she recalled instances. Up they rose; up rose everything her mind ranged over, subsiding immediately when the service was done. She had not conceived her beloved to be infallible, surest of guides in all earthly matters. Her intellect had sometimes protested.

What, then, had moved her to swamp it?

Her heart answered. And that heart also was arraigned: and the heart's fleshly habitation acting on it besides: so flagellant of herself was she: covertly, however, and as the chaste among women can consent to let our animal face them. Not grossly, still perceptibly to her penetrative hard eye on herself, she saw the senses of the woman under a charm. She saw, and swam whirling with a pang of revolt from her personal being and this mortal kind.

Her rational intelligence righted her speedily. She could say in truth, by proof, she loved the man: nature's love, heart's love, soul's love. She had given him her life.

It was a happy cross-current recollection, that the very beginning and spring of this wild cast of her life, issued from something he said and did (merest of airy gestures) to signify the blessing of life—how good and

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CHAPTER XXV Nataly in Action

fair it is. A drooping mood in her had been struck; he had a look like the winged lyric up in blue heavens: he raised the head of the young flower from its contemplation of grave-mould. That was when he had much to bear: Mrs. Burman present: and when the stranger in their household had begun to pity him and have a dread of her feelings. The lucent splendour of his eyes was memorable, a light above the rolling oceans of Time.

She had given him her life, little aid. She might have closely counselled, wound in and out with his ideas. Sensible of capacity, she confessed to the having been morally subdued, physically as well; swept onward; and she was arrested now by an accident, like a waif of the river-floods by the dip of a branch. Time that it should be! But was not Mr. Durance, inveighing against the favoured system for the education of women, right when he declared them to be unfitted to speak an opinion on any matter external to the household or in a crisis of the household? She had not agreed with him: he presented stinging sentences, which irritated more than they enlightened. Now it seemed to her, that the model women of men make pleasant slaves, not true mates: they lack the worldly training to know themselves or take a grasp of circumstances. There is an exotic fostering of the senses for women, not the strengthening breath of vital common air. If good fortune is with them, all may go well: the stake of their fates is upon the perpetual smooth flow of good fortune. She had never joined to the cry of the women. Few among them were having it in the breast as loudly.

Hard on herself, too, she perceived how the social

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rebel had reduced her mind to propitiate a simulacrum, reflected from out, of an enthroned Society within it, by an advocacy of the existing laws and rules and habits. Eminently servile is the tolerated lawbreaker: none so conservative. Not until we are driven back upon an unviolated Nature, do we call to the intellect to think radically: and then we begin to think of our fellows.

Or when we have set ourselves in motion direct for the doing of the right thing: have quitted the carriage at the station, and secured the ticket, and entered the train, counting the passage of time for a simple rapid hour before we have eased heart in doing justice to ourself and to another; then likewise the mind is lighted for radiation. That doing of the right thing, after a term of paralysis, cowardice—any evil name—is one of the mighty reliefs, equal to happiness, of longer duration.

Nataly had it. But her mind was actually radiating, and the comfort to her heart evoked the image of Dartrey Fenellan. She saw a possible reason for her bluntness to the coming scene with Dudley.

At once she said, No! and closed the curtain; knowing what was behind, counting it nought. She repeated almost honestly her positive negative. How we are mixed of the many elements! she thought, as an observer; and self-justifyingly thought on, and with truth, that duty urged her upon this journey; and proudly thought, that she had not a shock of the painful great organ in her breast at the prospect at the end, or any apprehension of its failure to carry her through.

Yet the need of peace or some solace needed to

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CHAPTER XXV Nataly in Action

prepare her for the interview turned her imagination burningly on Dartrey. She would not allow herself to meditate over hopes and schemes:—Nesta free: Dartrey free. She vowed to her soul sacredly—and she was one of those in whom the Divinity lives, that they may do so—not to speak a word for the influencing of Dudley save the one fact. Consequently, for a personal indulgence, she mused; she caressed maternally the object of her musing; of necessity, she excluded Nesta; but in tenderness she gave Dartrey a fair one to love him.

The scene was waved away. That one so loving him, partly worthy of him, ready to traverse the world now beside him—who could it be other than she who knew and prized his worth? Foolish! It is one of the hatefuller scourges upon women whenever, a little shaken themselves, they muse upon some man's image, that they cannot put in motion the least bit of drama without letting feminine self play a part; generally to develop into a principal part. The apology makes it a melancholy part.

Dartrey's temper of the caged lion dominated by his tamer, served as keynote for any amount of saddest colouring. He controlled the brute: but he held the contempt of danger, the love of strife, the passion for adventure; he had crossed the desert of human anguish. He of all men required a devoted mate, merited her. Of all men living, he was the hardest to match with a woman—with a woman deserving him.

The train had quitted London. Now for the country, now for free breathing! She who two days back had come from Alps, delighted in the look on flat green

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fields. It was under the hallucination of her saying in flight adieu to them, and to England; and, that somewhere hidden, to be found in Asia, Africa, America, was the man whose ideal of life was higher than enjoyment. His caged brute of a temper offered opportunities for delicious petting; the sweetest a woman can bestow: it lifts her out of timidity into an adoration still palpitatingly fearful. Ah, but familiarity, knowledge, confirmed assurance of his character, lift her to another stage, above the pleasures. May she not prove to him how really matched with him she is, to disdain the pleasures, cheerfully accept the burdens, meet death, if need be; readily face it as the quietly grey to-morrow: at least, show herself to her hero for a woman—the incredible being to most men—who treads the terrors as well as the pleasures of humanity beneath her feet, and may therefore have some pride in her stature. Ay, but only to feel the pride of standing not so shamefully below his level beside him.

Woods were flying past the carriage-windows. Her solitary companion was of the class of the admiring gentlemen. Presently he spoke. She answered. He spoke again. Her mouth smiled, and her accompanying look of abstract benevolence arrested the tentative allurement to conversation.

New ideas were set revolving in her. Dartrey and Victor grew to a likeness; they became hazily one man, and the mingled phantom complimented her on her preserving a good share of the beauty of her youth. The face perhaps: the figure rather too well suits the years! she replied. To reassure her, this Dartrey-Victor drew her close and kissed her; and

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CHAPTER XXV Nataly in Action

she was confused and passed into the breast of Mrs. Burman expecting an operation at the hands of the surgeons. The train had stopped. 'Penshurst?' she said.

'Penshurst is the next station,' said the gentleman. Here was a theme for him! The stately mansion, the noble grounds, and Sidney! He discoursed of them. The handsome lady appeared interested. She was interested also by his description of a neighbouring village, likely one hundred years hence to be a place of pilgrimage for Americans and far Australians. Age, he said, improves true beauty; and his eyelids indicated a levelling to perform the soft intentness. Mechanically, a ball rose in her throat; the remark was illuminated by a saying of Colney's, with regard to his countrymen at the play of courtship. No laughter came. The gentleman talked on.

All fancies and internal communications left her. Slowness of motion brought her to the plain piece of work she had to do, on a colourless earth, that seemed foggy; but one could see one's way. Resolution is a form of light, our native light in this dubious world.

Dudley Sowerby opened her carriage-door. They greeted.

'You have seen Nesta?' she said.

'Not for two days. You have not heard? The Miss Duvidneys have gone to Brighton.'

'They are rather in advance of the Season.'

She thanked him for meeting her. He was grateful for the summons.

Informing the mother of his betrothed, that he had ridden over from Cronidge, he speculated on the place to select for her luncheon, and he spoke of his horse

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CHAPTER XXV Nataly in Action

being led up and down outside the station. Nataly inquired for the hour of the next train to London. He called to one of the porters, obtained and imparted the time; evidently now, as shown by an unevenness of his lifted brows, expecting news of some little weight.

'Your husband is quite well?' he said, in affection for the name of husband.

'Mr. Radnor is well; I have to speak to you; I have more than time.'

'You will lunch at the inn?'

'I shall not eat. We will walk.'

They crossed the road and passed under trees.

'My mother was to have called on the Miss Duvidneys. They left hurriedly; I think it was unanticipated by Nesta. I venture . . . you pardon the liberty . . . she allows me to entertain hopes. Mr. Radnor, I am hardly too bold in thinking . . . I trust, in appealing to you . . . at least I can promise.'

'Mr. Sowerby, you have done my daughter the honour to ask her hand in marriage.'

He said: 'I have,' and had much to say besides, but deferred: a blow was visible. The father had been more encouraging to him than the mother.

'You have not known of any circumstance that might cause hesitation in asking?'

'Miss Radnor?'

'My daughter:—you have to think of your family.'

'Indeed, Mrs. Radnor, I was coming to London tomorrow, with the consent of my family.'

'You address me as Mrs. Radnor. I have not the legal right to the name.'

'Not legal!' said he, with a catch at the word.

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CHAPTER XXV Nataly in Action

He spun round in her sight, though his demeanour was manfully rigid.

'Have I understood, madam . . .?'

'You would not request me to repeat it. Is that your horse the man is leading?'

'My horse: it must be my horse.'

'Mount and ride back. Leave me: I shall not eat. Reflect by yourself. You are in the position of one who is not allowed to decide by his feelings. Mr. Radnor you know where to find.'

'But surely, some food? I cannot have misapprehended?'

'I cannot eat. I think you have understood me clearly.'

'You wish me to go?'

'I beg.'

'It pains me, dear madam.'

'It relieves me, if you will. Here is your horse.'

She gave her hand. He touched it and bent. He looked at her. A surge of impossible questions rolled to his mouth and rolled back, with the thought of an incredible thing, that her manner, more than her words, held him from doubting.

'I obey you,' he said.

'You are kind.'

He mounted horse, raised hat, paced on, and again bowing, to one of the wayside trees, cantered. The man was gone; but not from Nataly's vision that face of wet chalk under one of the shades of fire.

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CHAPTER XXVI

In which we see a Conventional Gentleman endeavouring to examine a Spectre of himself

Dudley rode back to Cronidge with his thunderstroke. It filled him, as in those halls of political clamour, where explanatory speech is not accepted, because of a drowning tide of hot blood on both sides. He sought to win attention by submitting a resolution, to the effect, that he would the next morning enter into the presence of Mr. Victor Radnor, bearing his family's feelings, for a discussion upon them. But the brutish tumult, in addition to surcharging, encased him: he could not rightly conceive the nature of feelings: men were driving shoals; he had lost hearing and touch of individual men; had become a house of angrily opposing parties.

He was hurt, he knew; and therefore he supposed himself injured, though there were contrary outcries, and he admitted that he stood free; he had not been inextricably deceived.

The girl was caught away to the thinnest of wisps in a dust-whirl. Reverting to the father and mother, his idea of a positive injury, that was not without its congratulations, sank him down among his disordered deeper sentiments; which were a diver's wreck, where an armoured livid subtermarine, a monstrous puff-ball of man, wandered seriously light in heaviness; trebling his hundredweights to keep him from dancing

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CHAPTER XXVI
In which we see a Conventional Gentleman endeavouring to examine a Spectre of himself

like a bladder-block of elastic lumber; thinking occasionally, amid the mournful spectacle, of the atmospheric pipe of communication with the world above, whereby he was deafened yet sustained. One tug at it, and he was up on the surface, disengaged from the hideous harness, joyfully no more that burly phantom cleaving green slime, free! and the roaring stopped; the world looked flat, foreign, a place of crusty promise. His wreck, animated by the dim strange fish below, appeared fairer; it winked lurefully when abandoned.

The internal state of a gentleman who detested intangible metaphor as heartily as the vulgarest of our gobble-gobbets hate it, metaphor only can describe; and for the reason, that he had in him just something more than is within the compass of the language of the meat-markets. He had—and had it not the less because he fain would not have had—sufficient stuff to furnish forth a soul's epic encounter between Nature and Circumstance: and metaphor, simile, analysis, all the fraternity of old lamps for lighting our abysmal darkness, have to be rubbed, that we may get a glimpse of the fray.

Free, and rejoicing; without the wish to be free; at the same time humbly and sadly acquiescing in the stronger claim of his family to pronounce the decision: such was the second stage of Dudley's perturbation after the blow. A letter of Nesta's writing was in his pocket: he knew her address. He could not reply to her until he had seen her father: and that interview remained necessarily prospective until he had come to his exact resolve, not omitting his critical approval of the sentences

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giving it shape, stamp, dignity—a noble's crest, as it were.

CHAPTER XXVI
In which we see a Conventional Gentleman endeavouring to examine a Spectre of himself

Nesta wrote briefly. The apostrophe was, 'Dear Mr. Sowerby.' She had engaged to send her address. Her father had just gone. The Miss Duvidneys had left the hotel yesterday for the furnished house facing the sea. According to arrangements, she had a livery-stable hack, and had that morning trotted out to the downs with a riding-master and company, one of whom was 'an agreeable lady.'

He noticed approvingly her avoidance of an allusion to the 'Delphica' of Mr. Durance's incomprehensible serial story, or whatever it was; which, as he had shown her, annoyed him, for its being neither fact nor fun; and she had insisted on the fun; and he had painfully tried to see it or anything of a meaning; and it seemed to him now, that he had been humiliated by the obedience to her lead: she had offended by her harping upon Delphica. However, here it was unmentioned. He held the letter out to seize it in the large, entire.

Her handwriting was good, as good as the writing of the most agreeable lady on earth. Dudley did not blame her for letting the lady be deceived in her—if she knew her position. She might be ignorant of it. And to strangers, to chance acquaintances, even to friends, the position, of the loathsome name, was not materially important. Marriage altered the view. He sided with his family.

He sided, edgeing away, against his family. But a vision of the earldom coming to him, stirred reverential objections, composed of all which his unstained family could protest in religion, to repudiate an alliance with

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CHAPTER XXVI
In which we see a Conventional Gentleman endeavouring to examine a Spectre of himself

a stained house, and the guilty of a condonation of immorality. Who would have imagined Mr. Radnor a private sinner flaunting for one of the righteous? And she, the mother, a lady—quite a lady; having really a sense of duty, sense of honour! That she must be a lady, Dudley was convinced. He beheld through a porous crape, woven of formal respectfulness, with threads of personal disgust, the scene, striking him drearly like a distant great mansion's conflagration across moorland at midnight, of a lady's breach of bonds and plunge of all for love. How had it been concealed? In Dudley's upper sphere, everything was exposed: Scandal walked naked and unashamed—figurante of the polite world. But still this lady was of the mint and coin, a true lady. Handsome now, she must have been beautiful. And a comprehensible pride (for so would Dudley have borne it) keeps the forsaken man silent up to death: . . . grandly silent; but the loss of such a woman is enough to kill a man! Not in time, though! Legitimacy evidently, by the mother's confession, cannot protect where it is wanted. Dudley was optically affected by a round spot of the world swinging its shadow over Nesta.

He pitied, and strove to be sensible of her. The effort succeeded so well, that he was presently striving to be insensible. The former state, was the mounting of a wall; the latter, was a sinking through a chasm. There would be family consultations, abhorrent; his father's agonized amazement at the problem presented to a family of scrupulous principles and pecuniary requirements; his mother's blunt mention of the abominable name—mediævally

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vindicated in champions of certain princely families indeed, but morally condemned; always under condemnation of the Church: a blot: and handed down: Posterity, and it might be a titled posterity, crying out. A man in the situation of Dudley could not think solely of himself. The nobles of the land are bound in honour to their posterity. There you have one of the prominent permanent distinctions between them and the commonalty.

CHAPTER XXVI
In which we see a Conventional Gentleman endeavouring to examine a Spectre of himself

His mother would again propose her chosen bride for him: Edith Averst, with the dowry of a present one thousand pounds per annum, and prospect of six or so, excluding Sir John's estate, Carping, in Leicestershire; a fair estate, likely to fall to Edith; consumption seized her brothers as they ripened. A fair girl too; only Dudley did not love her; he wanted to love. He was learning the trick from this other one, who had become obscured and diminished, tainted, to the thought of her; yet not extinct. Sight of her was to be dreaded.

Unguiltily tainted, in herself she was innocent. That constituted the unhappy invitation to him to swallow one half of his feelings, which had his world's blessing on it, for the beneficial enlargement and enthronement of the baser unblest half, which he hugged and distrusted. Can innocence issue of the guilty? He asked it, hopeing it might be possible: he had been educated in his family to believe, that the laws governing human institutions are divine—until History has altered them. They are altered, to present a fresh bulwark against the infidel. His conservative mind, retiring in good order, occupied the next rearward post of resistance. Secretly behind it,

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CHAPTER XXVI
In which we see a Conventional Gentleman endeavouring to examine a Spectre of himself

the man was proud of having a heart to beat for the cause of the besiegeing enemy, in the present instance. When this was blabbed to him, and he had owned it, he attributed his weakness to excess of nature, the liking for a fair face.—Oh, but more! spirit was in the sweet eyes. She led him—she did lead him in spiritual things; led him out of common circles of thought, into refreshing new spheres; he had reminiscences of his having relished the juices of the not quite obviously comic, through her indications: and really, in spite of her inferior flimsy girl's education, she could boast her acquirements; she was quick, startlingly; modest, too, in commerce with a slower mind that carried more; though she laughed and was a needle for humour: she taught him at times to put away his contempt of the romantic; she had actually shown him, that his expressed contempt of it disguised a dread: as it did, and he was conscious of the foolishness of it now while pursuing her image, while his intelligence and senses gave her the form and glory of young morning.

Wariness counselled him to think it might be merely the play of her youth; and also the disposition of a man in harness of business, exaggeratingly to prize an imagined finding of the complementary feminine of himself. Venerating purity as he did, the question, whether the very sweetest of pure young women, having such an origin, must not at some time or other show trace of the origin, surged up. If he could only have been sure of her moral exemption from taint, a generous ardour, in reserve behind his anxious dubieties, would have precipitated Dudley to quench disapprobation and brave the world under

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CHAPTER XXVI
In which we see a Conventional Gentleman endeavouring to examine a Spectre of himself

a buckler of those monetary advantages, which he had but stoutly to plead with the House of Cantor, for the speedy overcoming of a reluctance to receive the nameless girl and prodigious heiress. His family's instruction of him, and his inherited tastes, rendered the aspect of a Nature stripped of the clothing of the laws offensive down to devilish: we grant her certain steps, upon certain conditions accompanied by ceremonies; and when she violates them, she becomes visibly again the revolutionary wicked old beast bent on levelling our sacredest edifices. An alliance with any of her votaries, appeared to Dudley as an act of treason to his house, his class, and his tenets. And nevertheless he was haunted by a cry of criminal happiness for and at the commission of the act.

He would not decide to be 'precipitate,' and the days ran their course, until Lady Grace Halley arrived at Cronidge, a widow. Lady Cantor spoke to her of Dudley's unfathomable gloom. Lady Grace took him aside.

She said, without preface: 'You've heard, have you!'

'You were aware of it?' said he, and his tone was irritable with a rebuke.

'Coming through town, for the first time yesterday. I had it—of all men!—from a Sir Abraham Quatley, to whom I was recommended to go, about my husband's shares in a South American Railway; and we talked, and it came out. *He* knows; he says, it is not generally known; and he likes, respects Mr. Victor Radnor; we are to keep the secret. Hum? He had heard of your pretensions; and our relationship, etc.: "esteemed" it—you know the City dialect—his duty

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CHAPTER XXVI
In which we see a Conventional Gentleman endeavouring to examine a Spectre of himself

to mention, etc. That was after I had spied on his forehead the something I wormed out of his mouth. What are you going to do?'

'What can I do!'

'Are you fond of the girl?'

An attachment was indicated, as belonging to the case. She was not a woman to whom the breathing of pastoral passion would be suitable; yet he saw that she despised him for a lover; and still she professed to understand his dilemma. Perplexity at the injustice of fate and persons universally, put a wrinkled mask on his features and the expression of his feelings. They were torn, and the world was torn; and what he wanted, was delay, time for him to define his feelings and behold a recomposed picture of the world. He had already taken six days. He pleaded the shock to his family.

'You won't have such a chance again,' she said. Shrugs had set in.

They agreed as to the behaviour of the girl's mother. It reflected on the father, he thought.

'Difficult thing to proclaim, before an engagement!' Her shoulders were restless.

'When a man's feelings get entangled!'

'Oh! a man's feelings! I'm your British Jury for a woman's.'

'He has married her?'

She declared to not knowing particulars. She could fib smoothly.

The next day she was on the line to London, armed with the proposal of an appointment for the Hon. Dudley to meet 'the girl's father.'

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CHAPTER XXVII

Contains what is a Small Thing or a Great, as the Soul of the Chief Actor may decide

Skepsey ushered Lady Grace into his master's private room, and entertained her during his master's absence. He had buried his wife, he said: she feared, seeing his posture of the soaping of hands at one shoulder, that he was about to bewail it; and he did wish to talk of it, to show his modest companionship with her in loss, and how a consolation for our sorrows may be obtained: but he won her approval, by taking the acceptable course between the dues to the subject and those to his hearer, as a model cab should drive considerate equally of horse and fare.

A day of holiday at Hampstead, after the lowering of the poor woman's bones into earth, had been followed by a descent upon London; and at night he had found himself in the immediate neighbourhood of a public house, noted for sparring exhibitions and instructions on the first floor; and he was melancholy, unable quite to disperse 'the ravens' flocking to us on such days: though, if we ask why we have to go out of the world, there is a corresponding inquiry, of what good was our coming into it; and unless we are doing good work for our country, the answer is not satisfactory — except, that we are as well gone. Thinking which, he was accosted by a young woman: perfectly respectable, in every way: who inquired if

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CHAPTER XXVII Contains what is a Small Thing or a Great, as the Soul of the Chief Actor may decide

he had seen a young man enter the door. She described him, and reviled the temptations of those houses; and ultimately, as she insisted upon going in to look for the young man and use her persuasions to withdraw him from 'that snare of Satan,' he had accompanied her, and he had gone upstairs and brought the young man down. But friends, or the acquaintances they call friends, were with him, and they were 'in drink,' and abused the young woman; and she had her hand on the young man's arm, quoting Scripture. Sad to relate of men bearing the name of Englishmen—and it was hardly much better if they pleaded intoxication!—they were not content to tear the young man from her grasp, they hustled her, pushed her out, dragged her in the street.

'It became me to step to her defence: she was meek,' said Skepsey. 'She had a great opinion of the efficacy of quotations from Scripture; she did not recriminate. I was able to release her and the young man she protected, on condition of my going upstairs to give a display of my proficiency. I had assured them, that the poor fellows who stood against me were not a proper match. And of course, they jeered, but they had the evidence, on the pavement. So I went up with them. I was heavily oppressed, I wanted relief, I put on the gloves. He was a bigger man; they laughed at the little one. I told them, it depended upon a knowledge of first principles, and the power to apply them. I will not boast, my lady: my junior by ten years, the man went down; he went down a second time; and the men seemed surprised; I told them, it was nothing but first principles put into

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CHAPTER XXVII Contains what is a Small Thing or a Great, as the Soul of the Chief Actor may decide

action. I mention the incident, for the extreme relief it afforded me at the close of a dark day.'

'So you cured your grief!' said Lady Grace; and Skepsey made way for his master.

Victor's festival-lights were kindled, beholding her; cressets on the window-sill, lamps inside.

'Am I so welcome?' There was a pull of emotion at her smile. 'What with your little factotum and you, we are flattered to perdition when we come here. He has been proposing, by suggestion, like a Court-physician, the putting on of his boxing-gloves, for the consolation of the widowed:—meant most kindly! and it's a thousand pities women haven't their padded gloves.'

'Oh! but our boxing-gloves can do mischief enough. You have something to say, I see.'

'How do you see?'

'Tush, tush.'

The silly ring of her voice and the pathless tattle changed; she talked to suit her laden look. 'You hit it. I come from Dudley. He knows the facts. I wish to serve you, in every way.'

Victor's head had lifted.

'Who was it?'

'No enemy.'

'Who?'

'Her mother. She did rightly.'

'Certainly she did,' said Victor, and he thought that instantaneously of the thing done. 'Oh, then she spoke to him! She has kept it from me. For now nearly a week—six days—I've seen her spying for something she expected, like a face behind a door three inches ajar. She has not been half alive; she

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CHAPTER XXVII Contains what is a Small Thing or a Great, as the Soul of the Chief Actor may decide

refused explanations;—she was expecting to hear from him, of him;—the decision, whatever it 's to be!'

'I can't aid you there,' said Lady Grace. 'He 's one of the unreadables. He names Tuesday next week.'

'By all means.'

'She?'

'Fredi?—poor Fredi!—ah, my poor girl, yes!—No, she knows nothing. Here is the truth of it:—she, the legitimate, lives: they say she lives. Well, then, she lives against all rules physical or medical, lives by sheer force of will—it 's a miracle of the power of a human creature to . . . I have it from doctors, friends, attendants, they can't guess what she holds on, to keep her breath.—All the happiness in life!—if only it could benefit her. But it 's the cause of death to us. Do you see, dear friend;—you are a friend, proved friend,' he took her hand, and held and pressed it, in great need of a sanguine response to emphasis; and having this warm feminine hand, his ideas ran off with it. 'The friend I need! You have courage. My Nataly, poor dear—she can endure, in her quiet way. A woman of courage would take her place beside me and compel the world to do her homage, help;—a bright ready smile does it! She would never be beaten. Of course, we could have lived under a bushel—stifled next to death! But I am for light, air—battle, if you like. I want a comrade, not a —— not that I complain. I respect, pity, love—I do love her, honour: only, we want something else—courage—to face the enemy. Quite right, that she should speak to Dudley Sowerby. He has to know, must know; all who deal closely with us must know. But see a moment: I am waiting to see the impediment

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CHAPTER XXVII Contains what is a Small Thing or a Great, as the Soul of the Chief Actor may decide

dispersed, which puts her at an inequality with the world: and then I speak to all whom it concerns: not before: for her sake. How is it now? Dudley will ask . . . you understand. And when I am forced to confess, that the mother, the mother of the girl he seeks in marriage, is not yet in that state herself, probably at that very instant the obstacle has crumbled to dust! I say, probably: I have information—doctors, friends, attendants—they all declare it cannot last outside a week. But you are here—true, I could swear! a touch of a hand tells me. A woman's hand? Well, yes: I read by the touch of a woman's hand:—betrays more than her looks or her lips!' He sank his voice. 'I don't talk of condoling: if you are in grief, you know I share it.' He kissed her hand, and laid it on her lap; eyed it, and met her eyes; took a header into her eyes, and lost himself. A nip of his conscience moved his tongue to say: 'As for guilt, if it were known . . . a couple of ascetics—absolutely!' But this was assumed to be unintelligible; and it was merely the apology to his conscience in communion with the sprite of a petticoated fair one who was being subjected to tender little liberties, necessarily addressed in enigmas. He righted immediately, under a perception of the thoroughbred's contempt for the barriers of wattled sheep; and caught the word 'guilt,' to hide the Philistine citizen's lapse, by relating historically, in abridgement, the honest beauty of the passionate loves of the two whom the world proscribed for honestly loving. There was no guilt. He harped on the word, to erase the recollection of his first use of it.

'Fiddle,' said Lady Grace. 'The thing happened.

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CHAPTER XXVII Contains what is a Small Thing or a Great, as the Soul of the Chief Actor may decide

You have now to carry it through. You require a woman's aid in a social matter. Rely on me, for what I can do. You will see Dudley on Tuesday? I will write. Be plain with him; not forgetting the gilding, I need not remark. Your Nesta has no aversion?'

'Admires, respects, likes; is quite—is willing.'

'Good enough beginning.' She rose, for the atmosphere was heated, rather heavy. 'And if one proves to be of aid, you 'll own that a woman has her place in the battle.'

The fair black-clad widow's quick and singular interwreathing of the evanescent pretty pouts and frowns dimpled like the brush of the wind on a sunny pool in a shady place; and her forehead was close below his chin, her lips not far. Her apparel was attractively mourning. Widows in mourning, when they do not lean over extremely to the Stygian shore, with the complexions of the drugs which expedited the defunct to the ferry, provoke the manly arm within reach of them to pluck their pathetic blooming persons clean away from it. What of the widow who visibly likes the living? Compassion, sympathy, impulse; and gratitude, impulse again, living warmth; and a spring of the blood to wrestle with the King of Terrors for the other poor harper's half-nightcapped Eurydice; and a thirst, sudden as it is overpowering; and the solicitude, a reflective solicitude, to put the seal on a thing and call it a fact, to the astonishment of history; and a kick of our naughty youth in its coffin;—all the insurgencies of Nature, with her colonel of the regiment absent, and her veering trick to drive two vessels at the cross of a track into

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CHAPTER XXVII Contains what is a Small Thing or a Great, as the Soul of the Chief Actor may decide

collision, combine for doing that, which is very much more, and which affects us at the time so much less than did the pressure of a soft wedded hand by our own elsewhere pledged one. On the contrary, we triumph, we have the rich flavour of the fruit for our pains; we commission the historian to write in hieroglyphs a round big fact.

The lady passed through the trial submitting, stiffening her shoulders, and at the close, shutting her eyes. She stood cool in her blush, and eyed him like one gravely awakened. Having been embraced and kissed, she had to consider her taste for the man, and acknowledge a neatness of impetuosity in the deed; and he was neither apologizing culprit nor glorying bandit when it was done, but something of the lyric God tempering his fervours to a pleased sereneness, not offering a renewal of them. He glowed transparently. He said: 'You are the woman to take a front place in the battle!' With this woman beside him, it was a conquered world.

Comparisons, in the jotting souvenirs of a woman of her class and set, favoured him; for she disliked enterprising libertines and despised stumbling youths; and the genial simple glow of his look assured her that the vanished fiery moment would not be built on by a dating master. She owned herself. Or did she? Some understanding of how the other woman had been won to the leap with him, was drawing in about her. She would have liked to beg for the story; and she could as little do that as bring her tongue to reproach. If we come to the den! she said to her thought of reproach. Our semi-civilization makes it a den, where a scent in his nostrils will spring the

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CHAPTER XXVII Contains what is a Small Thing or a Great, as the Soul of the Chief Actor may decide

half-tamed animal away to wildness. And she had come unanticipatingly, without design, except perhaps to get a superior being to direct and restrain a gambler's hand; perhaps for the fee of a temporary pressure.

'I may be able to help a little—I hope!' she fetched a breath to say, while her eyelids mildly sermonized; and immediately she talked of her inheritance of property in stocks and shares.

Victor commented passingly on the soundness of them, and talked of projects he entertained:—Parliament! 'But I have only to mention it at home, and my poor girl will set in for shrinking.'

He doated on the diverse aspect of the gallant woman of the world.

'You succeed in everything you do,' said she, and she cordially believed it; and that belief set the neighbour memory palpitating. Success folded her waist, was warm upon her lips: she worshipped the figure of Success.

'I can't consent to fail, it's true, when my mind is on a thing,' Victor rejoined.

He looked his mind on Lady Grace. The shiver of a maid went over her. These transparent visages, where the thought which is half design is perceived as a lightning, strike lightning into the physically feebler. Her hand begged, with the open palm, her head shook thrice; and though she did not step back, he bowed to the negation, and then she gave him a grateful shadow of a smile, relieved, with a startled view of how greatly relieved, by that sympathetic deference in the wake of the capturing intrepidity.

'I am to name Tuesday for Dudley?' she suggested.

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CHAPTER XXVII Contains what is a Small Thing or a Great, as the Soul of the Chief Actor may decide

'At any hour he pleases to appoint.'

'A visit signifies . . .'

'Whatever it signifies!'

'I'm thinking of the bit of annoyance.'

'To me? Anything appointed, finds me ready the next minute.'

Her smile was flatteringly bright. 'By the way, keep your City people close about you: entertain as much as possible; dine them,' she said.

'At home?'

'Better. Sir Rodwell Blachington, Sir Abraham Quatley: and their wives. There's no drawing back now. And I will meet them.'

She received a compliment. She was on the foot to go.

But she had forgotten the Tiddler mine.

The Tiddler mine was leisurely mounting. Victor stated the figures; he saluted her hand, and Lady Grace passed out, with her heart on the top of them, and a buzz about it of the unexpected having occurred. She had her experiences to match new patterns in events; though not very many. Compared with gambling, the game of love was an idle entertainment. Compared with other players, this man was gifted.

Victor went in to Mr. Inchling's room, and kept Inchling from speaking, that he might admire him for he knew not what, or knew not well what. The good fellow was devoted to his wife. Victor in old days had called the wife Mrs. Grundy. She gossiped, she was censorious; she knew—could not but know—the facts; yet never by a shade was she disrespectful. He had a curious recollection of how his knowledge of Inchling and his wife being always in concert, entirely—whatever they might think in private—

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CHAPTER XXVII Contains what is a Small Thing or a Great, as the Soul of the Chief Actor may decide

devoted to him in action, had influenced, if it had not originally sprung, his resolve to cast off the pestilential cloak of obscurity shortening his days, and emerge before a world he could illumine to give him back splendid reflections. Inchling and his wife, it was: because the two were one: and if one, and subservient to him, knowing all the story, why, it foreshadowed a conquered world! They were the one pulse of the married Grundy beating in his hand. So it had been.

He rattled his views upon Indian business, to hold Inchling silent, and let his mind dwell almost lovingly on the good faithful spouse, who had no phosphorescent writing of a recent throbbing event on the four walls of his room.

Nataly was not so generously encountered in idea.

He felt and regretted this. He greeted her with a doubled affectionateness. Her pitiable deficiency of courage, excusing a man for this and that small matter in the thick of the conflict, made demands on him for gentle treatment.

'You have not seen any one?' she asked.

'City people. And you, my love?'

'Mr. Barmby called. He has gone down to Tunbridge Wells for a week, to some friend there.' She added, in pain of thought: 'I have seen Dartrey. He has brought Lord Clanconan to town, for a consultation, and expects he will have to take him to Brighton.'

'Brighton? What a life for a man like Dartrey, at Brighton!'

Her breast heaved. 'If I cannot see my Nesta there, he will bring her up to me for a day.'

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'But, my dear, I will bring her up to you, if it is your wish to see her.'

'It is becoming imperative that I should.'

'No hurry, no hurry: wait till the end of next week. And I must see Dartrey, on business, at once!'

CHAPTER XXVII Contains what is a Small Thing or a Great, as the Soul of the Chief Actor may decide

She gave the address in a neighbouring square. He had minutes to spare before dinner, and flew. She was not inquisitive.

Colney Durance had told Dartrey, that Victor was killing her. She had little animation; her smiles were ready, but faint. After her interview with Dudley, there had been a swoon at home; and her maid, sworn to secresy, willingly spared a tender-hearted husband —so good a master.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Mrs. Marsett

Little acts of kindness were not beyond the range of Colney Durance, and he ran down to Brighton, to give the exiled Nesta some taste of her friendly London circle. The Duvidney ladies knew that the dreaded gentleman had a regard for the girl. Their own, which was becoming warmer than they liked to think, was impressed by his manner of conversing with her. 'Child though she was,' he paid her the compliment of a sober as well as a satirical review of the day's political matter and recent publications; and the ladies were introduced, in a wonderment, to the damsel Delphica. They listened placidly to

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CHAPTER XXVIII
Mrs. Marsett

a discourse upon her performances, Japanese to their understandings.

At New York, behold, another adventurous representative and advocate of the European tongues has joined the party: Signor Jeridomani: a philologer, of course; a politician in addition; Macchiavelli redivivus, it seems to fair Delphica. The speech he delivers at the Syndicate Delmonico Dinner, is justly applauded by the New York Press as a masterpiece of astuteness. He appears to be the only one of the party who has an eye for the dark. She fancies she may know a more widely awake in the abstract. But now, thanks to jubilant Journals and Homeric laughter over the Continent, the secret is out, in so far as the concurrents are all unmasked and exposed for the edification of the American public. Dr. Bouthoin's eyebrows are up, Mr. Semhians disfigures his name by greatly gaping. Shall they return to their Great Britain indignant? Patriotism, with the sauce of a luxurious expedition at no cost to the private purse, restrains them. Moreover, there is no sign of any one of the others intending to quit the expedition; and Mr. Semhians has done a marvel or two in the cricket-field: Old England looks up where she can. What is painfully extraordinary to our couple, they find in the frigid attitude of the Americans toward their 'common tongue'; together with the rumour of a design to despatch an American rival emissary to Japan.

Nesta listened, inquired, commented, laughed; the ladies could not have a doubt that she was interested and understood. She would have sketches of scenes between Delphica and M. Falarique, with whom the

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young Germania was cleverly ingenuous indeed—a seminary Célimène; and between Delphica and M. Mytharete, with whom she was archæological, ravishingly amœbæan of Homer. Dr. Gannius holds a trump card in his artless daughter, conjecturally, for the establishment of the language of the gutturals in the far East. He has now a suspicion, that the inventive M. Falarique, melted down to sobriety by misfortune, may some day startle their camp by the cast of more than a crow into it, and he is bent on establishing alliances; frightens the supple Signor Jeridomani to lingual fixity; eulogizes Football, with Dr. Bouthoin; and retracts, or modifies, his dictum upon the English, that, 'masculine brawn they have in their bodies, but muscle they have not in their feminine minds'; to exalt them, for a signally clean, if a dense, people:

'Amousia, not Alousia, is their enemy.'—How, when we have the noblest crop of poets?—'You have never heartily embraced those aliens among you until you learnt from us, that you might brag of them.'—Have they not endowed us with the richest of languages?—'The words of which are used by you, as old slippers, for puns.' Mr. Semhians has been superciliously and ineffectively punning in foreign presences: he and his chief are inwardly shocked by a new perception;—What if, now that we have the populace for paymaster, subservience to the literary tastes of the populace should reduce the nation to its lowest mental level, and render us not only unable to compete with the foreigner, but unintelligible to him, although so proudly paid at home! Is it not thus that nations are seen of the Highest to be devouring themselves?

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CHAPTER XXVIII
Mrs. Marsett

'For,' says Dr. Gannius, as if divining them, 'this excessive and applauded productiveness, both of your juvenile and your senile, in your modern literature, is it ever a crop? Is it even the restorative perishable stuff of the markets? Is it not rather your street-pavement's patter of raindrops, incessantly in motion, and as fruitful?' Mr. Semhians appeals to Delphica. 'Genius you have,' says she, stiffening his neck-band, 'genius in superabundance':—he throttles to the complexion of the peony:—'perhaps criticism is wanting.' Dr. Gannius adds: 'Perhaps it is the drill-sergeant everywhere wanting for an unrivalled splendid rabble!'

Colney left the whole body of concurrents on the raised flooring of a famous New York Hall, clearly entrapped, and incited to debate before an enormous audience, as to the merits of their respective languages. 'I hear,' says Dr. Bouthoin to Mr. Semhians (whose gape is daily extending), 'that the tickets cost ten dollars!'

There was not enough of Delphica for Nesta.

Colney asked: 'Have you seen any of our band?'

'No,' she said, with good cheer, and became thoughtful, conscious of a funny reason for the wish to hear of the fictitious creature disliked by Dudley. A funny and a naughty reason, was it? Not so very naughty: but it was funny; for it was a spirit of opposition to Dudley, without an inferior feeling at all, such as girls should have.

Colney brought his viola for a duet; they had a pleasant musical evening, as in old days at Creckholt; and Nesta, going upstairs with the ladies to bed, made them share her father's amused view of the lamb of

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the flock this bitter gentleman became when he had the melodious instrument tucked under his chin. He was a guest for the night. Dressing in the early hour, Nesta saw him from her window on the parade, and soon joined him, to hear him at his bitterest, in the flush of the brine. 'These lengths of blank-faced terraces fronting sea!' were the satirist's present black beast. 'So these moneyed English shoulder to the front place; and that is the appearance they offer to their commercial God!' He gazed along the miles of 'English countenance,' drearily laughing. Changeful ocean seemed to laugh at the spectacle. Some Orphic joke inspired his exclamation: 'Capital!'

'Come where the shops are,' said Nesta.

'And how many thousand parsons have you here?'

'Ten, I think,' she answered in his vein, and warmed him; leading him contemplatively to scrutinize her admirers: the Rev. Septimus; Mr. Sowerby.

'News of our friend of the whimpering flute?'

'Here? no. I have to understand you!'

Colney cast a weariful look backward on the 'regiments of Anglo-Chinese' represented to him by the moneyed terraces, and said: 'The face of a stopped watch!—the only meaning it has is past date.'

He had no liking for Dudley Sowerby. But it might have been an allusion to the general view of the houses. But again, 'the meaning of it past date,' stuck in her memory. A certain face close on handsome, had a fatal susceptibility to caricature.

She spoke of her 'exile': wanted Skepsey to come down to her; moaned over the loss of her Louise.

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CHAPTER XXVIII
Mrs. Marsett

The puzzle of the reason for the long separation from her parents, was evident in her mind, and unmentioned.

They turned on to the pier.

Nesta reminded him of certain verses he had written to celebrate her visit to the place when she was a child:

> '"And then along the pier we sped,
> And there we saw a Whale:
> He seemed to have a Normous Head,
> And not a bit of Tail!"'

'Manifestly a foreigner to our shores, where the exactly inverse condition rules,' Colney said.

> '"And then we scampered on the beach,
> To chase the foaming wave;
> And when we ran beyond its reach
> We all became more brave."'

Colney remarked: 'I was a poet—for once.'

A neat-legged Parisianly-booted lady, having the sea-winds very enterprising with her dark wavy locks and jacket and skirts, gave a cry of pleasure and a silvery 'You dear!' at sight of Nesta; then at sight of one of us, moderated her tone to a propriety equalling the most conventional. 'We ride to-day?'

'I shall be one,' said Nesta.

'It would not be the commonest pleasure to me, if you were absent.'

'Till eleven, then!'

'After my morning letter to Ned.'

She sprinkled silvery sound on that name or on the adieu, blushed, blinked, frowned, sweetened her lip-lines, bit at the under one, and passed in a discomposure.

'The lady?' Colney asked.

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CHAPTER XXVIII
Mrs. Marsett

'She is—I meet her in the troop conducted by the riding-master: Mrs. Marsett.'

'And who is Ned?'

'It is her husband, to whom she writes every morning. He is a captain in the army, or was. He is in Norway, fishing.'

'Then the probability is, that the English officer continues his military studies.'

'Do you not think her handsome, Mr. Durance?'

'Ned may boast of his possession, when he has trimmed it and toned it a little.'

'She is different, if you are alone with her.'

'It is not unusual,' said Colney.

At eleven o'clock he was in London, and Nesta rode beside Mrs. Marsett amid the troop.

A South-easterly wind blew the waters to shifty gold-leaf prints of brilliance under the sun.

'I took a liberty this morning, I called you "Dear" this morning,' the lady said. 'It's what I feel, only I have no right to blurt out everything I feel, and I was ashamed. I am sure I must have appeared ridiculous. I got quite nervous.'

'You would not be ridiculous to me.'

'I remember I spoke of Ned.'

'You have spoken of him before.'

'Oh! I know: to you alone. I should like to pluck out my heart and pitch it on the waves, to see whether it would sink or swim. That's a funny idea, isn't it! I tell you everything that comes up. What shall I do when I lose you! You always make me feel you've a lot of poetry ready-made in you.'

'We will write. And you will have your husband then.'

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CHAPTER XXVIII
Mrs. Marsett

'When I had finished my letter to Ned, I dropped my head on it and behaved like a fool for several minutes. I can't bear the thought of losing you!'

'But you don't lose me,' said Nesta; 'there is no ground for your supposing that you will. And your wish not to lose me, binds me to you more closely.'

'If you knew!' Mrs. Marsett caught at her slippery tongue, and she carolled: 'If we all knew everything, we should be wiser, and what a naked lot of people we should be!'

They were crossing the passage of a cavalcade of gentlemen, at the end of the East Cliff. One among them, large and dominant, with a playful voice of brass, cried out: 'And how do you do, Mrs. Judith Marsett—ha? Beautiful morning?'

Mrs. Marsett's figure tightened; she rode stonily erect, looked level ahead. Her woman's red mouth was shut fast on a fighting underlip.

'He did not salute you,' Nesta remarked, to justify her for not having responded.

The lady breathed a low thunder: 'Coward!'

'He cannot have intended to insult you,' said Nesta.

'That man knows I will not notice him. He is a beast. He will learn that I carry a horsewhip.'

'Are you not taking a little incident too much to heart?'

The sigh of the heavily laden came from Mrs. Marsett: 'Am I pale? I dare say. I shall go on my knees to-night hating myself that I was born "one of the frail sex." We are, or we should ride at the coward and strike him to the ground. Pray, pray, do not look distressed! Now you know my Christian

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name. That dog of a man barks it out on the roads. It doesn't matter.'

'He has offended you before?'

'You are near me. They can't hurt me, can't touch me, when I think that I'm talking with you. How I envy those who call you by your Christian name.'

'Nesta,' said smiling Nesta. The smile was forced, that she might show kindness, for the lady was jarring on her.

Mrs. Marsett opened her lips: 'Oh, my God, I shall be crying!—let's gallop. No, wait, I'll tell you. I wish I could! I will tell you of that man. That man is Major Worrell. One of the majors who manage to get to their grade. A retired warrior. He married a handsome woman, above him in rank, with money; a good woman. She was a good woman, or she would have had her vengeance, and there was never a word against her. She must have loved that—Ned calls him, full-blooded ox. He spent her money, and he deceived her.—You innocent! Oh, you dear! I'd give the world to have your eyes. I've heard tell of "crystal clear," but eyes like yours have to tell me how deep and clear. Such a world for them to be in! I did pray, and used your name last night on my knees, that you—I said Nesta—might never have to go through other women's miseries. Ah me! I have to tell you he deceived her. You don't quite understand.'

'I do understand,' said Nesta.

'God help you!—I am excited to-day. That man is poison to me. His wife forgave him three times. On three occasions, that unhappy woman forgave him. He is great at his oaths, and a big breaker of them.

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CHAPTER XXVIII
Mrs. Marsett

She walked out one November afternoon and met him riding along with a notorious creature. You know there are bad women. They passed her, laughing. And look there, Nesta, see that groyne; that very one.' Mrs. Marsett pointed her whip hard out. 'The poor lady went down from the height *here*; she walked into that rough water—look!—steadying herself along it, and she plunged; she never came out alive. A week after her burial, Major Worrell—I've told you enough.'

'We'll gallop now,' said Nesta.

Mrs. Marsett's talk, her presence hardly less, affected the girl with those intimations of tumult shown upon smooth waters when the great elements are conspiring. She felt that there was a cause why she had to pity, did pity her. It might be, that Captain Marsett wedded one who was of inferior station, and his wife had to bear blows from cruel people. The supposition seemed probable. The girl accepted it; for beyond it, as the gathering of the gale masked by hills, lay a brewing silence. What? She did not reflect. Her quick physical sensibility curled to some breath of heated atmosphere brought about her by this new acquaintance: not pleasant, if she had thought of pleasure: intensely suggestive of our life at the consuming tragic core, round which the furnace pants. But she was unreflecting, feeling only a beyond and hidden.

Besides, she was an exile. Spelling at dark things in the dark, getting to have the sight which peruses darkness, she touched the door of a mystery that denied her its key, but showed the lock; and her life was beginning to know of hours that fretted her to

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recklessness. Her friend Louise was absent: she had so few friends—owing to that unsolved reason: she wanted one, of any kind, if only gentle: and this lady seemed to need her: and she flattered; Nesta was in the mood for swallowing and digesting and making sweet blood of flattery.

At one time, she liked Mrs. Marsett best absent: in musing on her, wishing her well, having said the adieu. For it was wearisome to hear praises of 'innocence'; and women can do so little to cure that 'wickedness of men,' among the lady's conversational themes; and 'love' too: it may be a 'plague,' and it may be 'heaven': it is better left unspoken of. But there were times when Mrs. Marsett's looks and tones touched compassion to press her hand: an act that had a pledgeing signification in the girl's bosom: and when, by the simple avoidance of ejaculatory fervours, Mrs. Marsett's quieted good looks had a shadow of a tender charm, more pathetic than her outcries were.

These had not always the sanction of polite usage: and her English was guilty of sudden lapses to the Thames-water English of commerce and drainage instead of the upper wells. But there are many uneducated ladies in the land. Many, too, whose tastes in romantic literature betray now and then by peeps a similarity to Nesta's maid Mary's. Mrs. Marsett liked love, blood, and adventure. She had, moreover, a favourite noble poet, and she begged Nesta's pardon for naming him, and she would not name him, and told her she must not read him until she was a married woman, because he did mischief to girls. Thereupon she fell into one of her silences, emerg-

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CHAPTER XXVIII
Mrs. Marsett

ing with a cry of hate of herself for having ever read him. She did not blame the bard. And, ah, poor bard! he fought his battle: he shall not be named for the brand on the name. He has lit a sulphur match for the lower of nature through many a generation; and to be forgiven by sad frail souls who could accuse him of pipéing devil's agent to them at the perilous instant—poor girls too!—is chastisement enough. This it is to be the author of unholy sweets: a Posterity sitting in judgement will grant, that they were part of his honest battle with the hypocrite English Philistine, without being dupe of the plea or at all the thirsty swallower of his sugary brandy. Mrs. Marsett expressed aloud her gladness of escape in never having met a man like him; followed by her regret that 'Ned' was so utterly unlike; except 'perhaps'—and she hummed; she was off on the fraternity in wickedness.

Nesta's ears were fatigued. 'My mother writes of you,' she said, to vary the subject.

Mrs. Marsett looked. She sighed downright: 'I have had my dream of a friend!—It was that gentleman with you on the pier! Your mother objects?'

'She has inquired, nothing more.'

'I am not twenty-three: not as old as I should be, for a guide to you. I know I would never do you harm. That I know. I would walk into that water first, and take Mrs. Worrell's plunge:—the last bath; a thorough cleanser for a woman! Only, she was a good woman and didn't want it, as we—as lots of us do:—to wash off all recollection of having met a man! Your mother would not like me to call you Nesta! I have never begged you to call me Judith. Damnable name!' Mrs. Marsett revelled in the heat of the

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CHAPTER XXVIII Mrs. Marsett

curse on it, as a relief to torture of the breast, until a sense of the girl's alarmed hearing sent the word reverberating along her nerves and shocked her with such an exposure of our Shaggy wild one on a lady's lips. She murmured: 'Forgive me,' and had the passion to repeat the epithet in shrieks, and scratch up male speech for a hatefuller; but the twitch of Nesta's brows made her say: 'Do pardon me. I did something in Scripture. Judith could again. Since that brute Worrell crossed me riding with you, I loathe my name; I want to do things. I have offended you.'

'We have been taught differently. I do not use those words. Nothing else.'

'They frighten you.'

'They make me shut; that is all.'

'Supposing you were some day to discover . . . ta-ta-ta, all the things there are in the world.' Mrs. Marsett let fly an artificial chirrup. 'You must have some ideas of me.'

'I think you have had unhappy experiences.'

'Nesta . . . just now and then! the first time we rode out together, coming back from the downs, I remember, I spoke, without thinking—I was enraged—of a case in the newspapers; and you had seen it, and you were not afraid to talk of it. I remember I thought, Well, for a girl, she's bold! I thought you knew more than a girl ought to know:—until—you did—you set my heart going. You spoke of the poor women like an angel of compassion. You said, we were all mixed up with their fate—I forget the words. But no one ever heard in Church anything that touched me so. I worshipped you. You said, you thought of them often, and longed to find out what you could do

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CHAPTER XXVIII
Mrs. Marsett

to help. And I thought, if they could hear you, and only come near you, as I was—ah, my heaven!—Unhappy experiences? Yes. But when men get women on the slope to their perdition, they have no mercy, none. They deceive, and they lie; they are false in acts and words; they do as much as murder. They're never hanged for it. They make the Laws! And then they become fathers of families, and point the finger at the "wretched creatures." They have a dozen names against women, for one at themselves.'

'It maddens me at times to think . . .!' said Nesta, burning with the sting of vile names.

'Oh, there are bad women as well as bad men: but men have the power and the lead, and they take advantage of it; and then they turn round and execrate us for not having what they have robbed us of!'

'I blame women—if I may dare, at my age,' said Nesta, and her bosom heaved. 'Women should feel for their sex; they should not allow the names; they should go among their unhappier sisters. At the worst, they are sisters! I am sure, that fallen cannot mean—Christ shows it does not. He changes the tone of Scripture. The women who are made outcasts, must be hopeless and go to utter ruin. We should, if we pretend to be better, step between them and that. There cannot be any goodness unless it is a practised goodness. Otherwise it is nothing more than paint on canvas. You speak to me of my innocence. What is it worth, if it is only a picture and does no work to help to rescue. I fear I think most of the dreadful names that redden and sicken us.—The Old Testament!—I have a French

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friend, a Mademoiselle Louise de Seilles—you should hear her: she is intensely French, and a Roman Catholic, everything which we are not: but so human, so wise, and so full of the pride of her sex! I love her. It is love. She will never marry until she meets a man who has the respect for women, for all women. We both think we cannot separate ourselves from our sisters. She seems to me to wither men, when she speaks of their injustice, their snares to mislead and their cruelty when they have succeeded. She is right, it is the—brute: there is no other word.'

'And French and good!' Mrs. Marsett ejaculated. 'My Ned reads French novels, and he says, their women . . . But your mademoiselle is a real one. If she says all that, I could kneel to her, French or not. Does she talk much about men and women?'

'Not often: we lose our tempers. She wants women to have professions; at present they have not much choice to avoid being penniless. Poverty, and the sight of luxury! It seems as if we produced the situation, to create an envious thirst, and cause the misery. Things are improving for them; but we groan at the slowness of it.'

Mrs. Marsett now declared a belief, that women were nearly quite as bad as men. 'I don't think I could take up with a profession. Unless to be a singer. Ah! Do you sing?'

Nesta smiled: 'Yes, I sing.'

'How I should like to hear you! My Ned's a thorough Englishman — gentleman, you know: he cares only for sport; Shooting, Fishing, Hunting; and Football, Cricket, Rowing, and matches. He's

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CHAPTER XXVIII
Mrs. Marsett

immensely proud of England in those things. And such muscle he has!—though he begins to fancy his heart's rather weak. It's digestion, I tell him. But he takes me to the Opera sometimes—Italian Opera; he can't stand German. Down at his place in Leicestershire, he tells me, when there's company, he has—I'm sure you sing beautifully. When I hear beautiful singing, even from a woman they tell tales of, upon my word, it's true, I feel my sins all melting out of me and I'm new-made: I can't bear Ned to speak. Would you one day, one afternoon, before the end of next week?—it would do me such real good, you can't guess how much; if I could persuade you! I know I'm asking something out of rules. For just half an hour! I judge by your voice in talking. Oh! it would do me good—good—good to hear you sing. There is a tuned piano—a cottage; I don't think it sounds badly. You would not see any great harm in calling on me?—once!'

'No,' said Nesta. And it was her nature that projected the word. Her awakened wits were travelling to her from a distance, and she had an intimation of their tidings; and she could not have said what they were; or why, for a moment, she hesitated to promise she would come. Her vision of the reality of things was without written titles, to put the stamp of the world on it. She felt this lady to be one encompassed and in the hug of the elementary forces, which are the terrors to inexperienced pure young women. But she looked at her, and dared trust those lips, those eyes. She saw, through whatever might be the vessel, the spirit of the woman;

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as the upper nobility of our brood are enabled to do in a crisis mixed of moral aversion and sisterly sympathy, when nature cries to them, and the scales of convention, the mud-spots of accident, even naughtiness, even wickedness, all misfortune's issue, if we but see the one look upward, fall away. Reason is not excluded from these blind throbs of a blood that strikes to right the doings of the Fates. Nesta did not err in her divination of the good and the bad incarnate beside her, though both good and bad were behind a curtain; the latter sparing her delicate senses, appealing to chivalry, to the simply feminine claim on her. Reason, acting in her heart as a tongue of the flames of the forge where we all are wrought, told her surely that the good predominated. She had the heart which is at our primal fires when nature speaks.

She gave the promise to call on Mrs. Marsett and sing to her.

'An afternoon? Oh! what afternoon?' she was asked, and she said: 'This afternoon, if you like.'

So it was agreed: Mrs. Marsett acted violently the thrill of delight she felt in the prospect.

The ladies Dorothea and Virginia consulted, and pronounced the name of Marsett to be a reputable County name. 'There was a Leicestershire baronet of the name of Marsett.' They arranged to send their button-blazing boy at Nesta's heels. Mrs. Marsett resided in a side-street not very distant from the featureless but washed and orderly terrace of the glassy stare at sea.

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CHAPTER XXIX

Shows one of the Shadows of the World crossing a Virgin's Mind

Nesta and her maid were brought back safely through the dusk by their constellation of a boy, to whom the provident ladies had entrusted her. They could not but note how short her syllables were. Her face was only partly seen. They had returned refreshed from their drive on the populous and orderly parade—so fair a pattern of their England!—after discoursing of 'the dear child,' approving her manners, instancing proofs of her intelligence, nay, her possession of 'character.' They did so, notwithstanding that these admissions were worse than their growing love for the girl, to confound established ideas. And now, in thoughtfulness on her behalf, Dorothea said, 'We have considered, Nesta, that you may be lonely; and if it is your wish, we will leave our card on your new acquaintance.' Nesta took her hand and kissed it; she declined, saying, 'No,' without voice.

They had two surprises at the dinner-hour. One was the card of Dartrey Fenellan, naming an early time next day for his visit; and the other was the appearance of the Rev. Stuart Rem, a welcome guest. He had come to meet his Bishop.

He had come also with serious information for the ladies, regarding the Rev. Abram Posterley. No sooner was this out of his mouth than both ladies exclaimed: 'Again!' So serious was it, that there

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CHAPTER XXIX
Shows one of the Shadows of the World crossing a Virgin's Mind

had been a consultation at the Wells; Mr. Posterley's friend, the Rev. Septimus Barmby, and his own friend, the Rev. Groseman Buttermore, had journeyed from London to sit upon the case: and, 'One hoped,' Mr. Stuart Rem said, 'poor Posterley would be restored to the senses he periodically abandoned.' He laid a hand on Tasso's curls, and withdrew it at a menace of teeth. Tasso would submit to rough caresses from Mr. Posterley; he would not allow Mr. Stuart Rem to touch him. Why was that? Perhaps for the reason of Mr. Posterley's being so emotional as perpetually to fall a victim to some bright glance and require the rescue of his friends; the slave of woman had a magnet for animals!

Dorothea and Virginia were drawn to compassionate sentiments, in spite of the provokeing recurrence of Mr. Posterley's malady. He had not an income to support a wife. Always was this unfortunate gentleman entangling himself in a passion for maid or widow of the Wells: and it was desperate, a fever. Mr. Stuart Rem charitably remarked on his taking it so severely because of his very scrupulous good conduct. They pardoned a little wound to their delicacy, and asked: 'On this occasion?' Mr. Stuart Rem named a linendraper's establishment near the pantiles, where a fair young woman served. 'And her reputation?' That was an article less presentable through plate-glass, it seemed: Mr. Stuart Rem drew a prolonged breath into his nose.

'It is most melancholy!' they said in unison. 'Nothing positive,' said he. 'But the suspicion of a shadow, Mr. Stuart Rem! You will not permit it?' He stated, that his friend Buttermore might have

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CHAPTER XXIX
Shows one of the Shadows of the World crossing a Virgin's Mind

influence. Dorothea said: 'When I think of Mr. Posterley's addiction to ceremonial observances, and to matrimony, I cannot but think of a sentence that fell from Mr. Durance one day, with reference to that division of our Church: he called it:—you frown! and I would only quote Mr. Durance to you in support of your purer form, as we hold it to be:—with the candles, the vestments, Confession, alas! he called it, "Rome and a wife."'

Mr. Stuart Rem nodded an enforced assent: he testily dismissed mention of Mr. Durance, and resumed on Mr. Posterley.

The good ladies now, with some of their curiosity appeased, considerately signified to him, that a young maiden was present.

The young maiden had in heart stuff to render such small gossip a hum of summer midges. She did not imagine the dialogue concerned her in any way. She noticed Mr. Stuart Rem's attentive scrutiny of her from time to time. She had no sensitiveness, hardly a mind for things about her. To-morrow she was to see Captain Dartrey. She dwelt on that prospect, for an escape from the meshes of a painful hour—the most woeful of the hours she had yet known—passed with Judith Marsett: which dragged her soul through a weltering of the deeps, tossed her over and over, still did it with her ideas. It shocked her nevertheless to perceive how much of the world's flayed life and harsh anatomy she had apprehended, and so coldly, previous to Mrs. Marsett's lift of the veil in her story of herself: a skipping revelation, terrible enough to the girl; whose comparison of the previously suspected things with the things now revealed imposed

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CHAPTER XXIX
Shows one of the Shadows of the World crossing a Virgin's Mind

the thought of her having been both a precocious and a callous young woman: a kind of 'Delphica without the erudition,' her mind phrased it airily over her chagrin.—And the silence of Dudley proved him to have discovered his error in choosing such a person: he was wise, and she thanked him. She had an envy of the ignorant-innocents adored by the young man she cordially thanked for quitting her. She admired the white coat of armour they wore, whether bestowed on them by their constitution or by prudence. For while combating mankind now on Judith Marsett's behalf, personally she ran like a hare from the mere breath of an association with the very minor sort of similar charges; ardently she desired the esteem of mankind; she was at moments abject. But had she actually been aware of the facts now known?

Those wits of the virgin young, quickened to shrewdness by their budding senses—and however vividly—require enlightenment of the audible and visible before their sterner feelings can be heated to break them away from a blushful dread and force the mind to know. As much as the wilfully or naturally blunted, the intelligently honest have to learn by touch: only, their understandings cannot meanwhile be so wholly obtuse as our society's matron, acting to please the tastes of the civilized man—a creature that is not clean-washed of the Turk in him—barbarously exacts. The signor aforesaid is puzzled to read the woman, who is after all in his language; but when it comes to reading the maiden, she appears as a phosphorescent hieroglyph to some speculative Egyptologer; and he insists upon distinct lines and

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CHAPTER XXIX
Shows one of the Shadows of the World crossing a Virgin's Mind

characters; no variations, if he is to have sense of surety. Many a young girl is misread by the amount she seems to know of our construction, history, and dealings, when it is not more than her sincere ripeness of nature, that has gathered the facts of life profuse about her, and prompts her through one or other of the instincts, often vanity, to show them to be not entirely strange to her; or haply her filly nature is having a fling at the social harness of hypocrisy. If you (it is usually through the length of ears of your Novelist that the privilege is yours) have overheard queer communications passing between girls,—and you must act the traitor eavesdropper or Achilles masquerader to overhear so clearly,—these, be assured, are not specially the signs of their corruptness. Even the exceptionally cynical are chiefly to be accused of bad manners. Your Moralist is a myopic preacher, when he stamps infamy on them, or on our later generation, for the kick they have at grandmother decorum, because you do not or cannot conceal from them the grinning skeleton behind it.

Nesta once had dreams of her being loved: and she was to love in return for a love that excused her for loving double, treble; as not her lover could love, she thought with grateful pride in the treasure she was to pour out at his feet; as only one or two (and they were women) in the world had ever loved. Her notion of the passion was parasitic: man the tree, woman the bine: but the bine was flame to enwind and to soar, serpent to defend, immortal flowers to crown. The choice her parents had made for her in Dudley, behind the mystery she had scent of, nipped her dream, and prepared her to meet, as it were, the

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CHAPTER XXIX
Shows one of the Shadows of the World crossing a Virgin's Mind

fireside of a November day instead of springing up and into the dawn's blue of full summer with swallows on wing. Her station in exile at the Wells of the weariful rich, under the weight of the sullen secret, unenlivened by Dudley's courtship, subdued her to the world's decrees; phrased thus: 'I am not to be a heroine.' The one golden edge to the view was, that she would greatly please her father.

Her dream of a love was put away like a botanist's pressed weed. But after hearing Judith Marsett's wild sobs, it had no place in her cherishing. For, above all, the unhappy woman protested love to have been the cause of her misery. She moaned of 'her Ned'; of his goodness, his deceitfulness, her trustfulness; his pride and the vileness of his friends; her long-suffering and her break down of patience. It was done for the proof of her unworthiness of Nesta's friendship: that she might be renounced, and embraced. She told the pathetic half of her story, to suit the gentle ear, whose critical keenness was lost in compassion. How deep the compassion, mixed with the girl's native respect for the evil-fortuned, may be judged by her inaccessibility to a vulgar tang that she was aware of in the deluge of the torrent, where Innocence and Ned and Love and a proud Family and that beast Worrell rolled together in leaping and shifting involutions.

A darkness of thunder was on the girl. Although she was not one to shrink beneath it like the small bird of the woods, she had to say within herself many times, 'I shall see Captain Dartrey to-morrow,' for a recovery and a nerving. And with her thought of him, her tooth was at her underlip, she struggled

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CHAPTER XXIX
Shows one of the Shadows of the World crossing a Virgin's Mind

abashed, in hesitation over men's views of her sex, and how to bring a frank mind to meet him; to be sure of his not at heart despising; until his character swam defined and bright across her scope. 'He is good to women.' Fragments of conversation, principally her father's, had pictured Captain Dartrey to her most manfully tolerant toward a frivolous wife.

He came early in the morning, instantly after breakfast.

Not two minutes had passed before she was at home with him. His words, his looks, revived her spirit of romance, gave her the very landscapes, and new ones. Yes, he was her hero. But his manner made him also an adored big brother, stamped splendid by the perils of life. He sat square, as if alert to rise, with an elbow on a knee, and the readiest turn of head to speakers, the promptest of answers, eyes that were a brighter accent to the mouth, so vividly did look accompany tone. He rallied her, chatted and laughed; pleased the ladies by laughing at Colney Durance, and inspired her with happiness when he spoke of England:—that 'One has to be in exile awhile, to see the place she takes.'

'Oh, Captain Dartrey, I do like to hear you say so,' she cried; his voice was reassuring also in other directions: it rang of true man.

He volunteered, however, a sad admission, that England had certainly lost something of the great nation's proper conception of Force: the meaning of it, virtue of it, and need for it. 'She bleats for a lesson, and will get her lesson.'

But if we have Captain Dartrey, we shall come through! So said the sparkle of Nesta's eyes.

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CHAPTER XXIX
Shows one of the Shadows of the World crossing a Virgin's Mind

'She is very like her father,' he said to the ladies.

'We think so,' they remarked.

'There's the mother too,' said he; and Nesta saw that the ladies shadowed.

They retired. Then she begged him to 'tell her of her own dear mother.' The news gave comfort, except for the suspicion, that the dear mother was being worn by her entertaining so largely. 'Papa is to blame,' said Nesta.

'A momentary strain. Your father has an idea of Parliament; one of the London Boroughs.'

'And I, Captain Dartrey, when do I go back to them?'

'Your mother comes down to consult with you. And now, do we ride together?'

'You are free?'

'My uncle, Lord Clan, lets me out.'

'To-day?'

'Why, yes!'

'This morning?'

'In an hour's time.'

'I will be ready.'

Nesta sent a line of excuse to Mrs. Marsett, throwing in a fervent adjective for balm.

That fair person rode out with the troop under conduct of the hallowing squire of the stables, and passed by Nesta on horseback beside Dartrey Fenellan at the steps of a huge hotel; issuing from which, pretty Mrs. Blathenoy was about to mount. Mrs. Marsett looked ahead and coloured, but she could not restrain one look at Nesta, that embraced her cavalier. Nesta waved hand to her, and nodded. Mrs. Marsett withdrew her eyes; her doing so, silent though it was,

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CHAPTER XXIX
Shows one of the Shadows of the World crossing a Virgin's Mind

resembled the drag back to sea of the shingle-wave below her, such a screaming of tattle she heard in the questions discernible through the attitude of the cavalier and of the lady, who paused to stare, before the leap up in the saddle. 'Who is she?—what is she?—how did you know her?—where does she come from?—wears her hat on her brows!—huge gauntlets out of style!—shady! shady! shady!' And as always during her nervous tumults, the name of Worrell made diapason of that execrable uproar. Her hat on her brows had an air of dash, defying a world it could win, as Ned well knew. But she scanned her gauntlets disapprovingly. This town, we are glad to think, has a bright repute for glove-shops. And Mrs. Marsett could applaud herself for sparing Ned's money; she had mended her gloves, if they were in the fashion.—But how does the money come? Hark at that lady and that gentleman questioning Miss Radnor of everything, everything in the world about her! Not a word do they get from Miss Radnor. And it makes them the more inquisitive. Idle rich people, comfortably fenced round, are so inquisitive! And Mrs. Marsett, loving Nesta for the notice of her, maddened by the sting of tongues it was causing, heard the wash of the beach, without consciousness of analogies, but with a body ready to jump out of skin, out of life, in desperation at the sound.

She was all impulse; a shifty piece of unmercenary stratagem occasionally directing it. Arrived at her lodgings, she wrote to Nesta: 'I entreat you not to notice me, if you pass me on the road again. Let me drop, never mind how low I go. I was born to be wretched. A line from you, just a line now and then,

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only to show me I am not forgotten. I have had a beautiful dream. I am not bad in reality; I love goodness, I know. I cling to the thought of you, as my rescue, I declare. Please, let me hear: if it's not more than "good day" and your initials on a post-card.'

CHAPTER XXIX
Shows one of the Shadows of the World crossing a Virgin's Mind

The letter brought Nesta in person to her.

CHAPTER XXX

The Burden upon Nesta

Could there be confidences on the subject of Mrs. Marsett with Captain Dartrey?—Nesta timidly questioned her heart: she knocked at an iron door shut upon a thing alive. The very asking froze her, almost to stopping her throbs of pity for the woman. With Captain Dartrey, if with any one; but with no one. Not with her mother even. Toward her mother, she felt guilty of knowing. Her mother had a horror of that curtain. Nesta had seen it, and had taken her impressions; she, too, shrank from it; the more when impelled to draw near it. Louise de Seilles would have been another self; Louise was away; when to return, the dear friend could not state. Speaking in her ear, would have been possible; the theme precluded writing.

It was ponderous combustible new knowledge of life for a girl to hold unaided. In the presence of the simple silvery ladies Dorothea and Virginia, she had qualms, as if she were breaking out in spots before them. The ladies fancied, that Mr. Stuart Rem had

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CHAPTER XXX
The Burden upon Nesta

hinted to them oddly of the girl; and that he might have meant, she appeared a little too cognizant of poor Mr. Abram Posterley's malady—as girls, in these terrible days, only too frequently, too brazenly, are. They discoursed to her of the degeneracy of the manners, nay, the morals of young Englishwomen, once patterns! They sketched the young English gentlewoman of their time; indeed a beauty; with round red cheeks, and rounded open eyes, and a demure shut mouth, a puppet's divine ignorance; inoffensive in the highest degree, rightly worshipped. They were earnest, and Nesta struck at herself. She wished to be as they had been, reserving her painful independence.

They were good: they were the ideal women of our country; which demands if it be but the semblance of the sureness of stationary excellence; such as we have in Sèvres and Dresden, polished bright and smooth as ever by the morning's flick of a duster; perhaps in danger of accidents—accidents must be kept away; but enviable, admirable, we think, when we are not thinking of seed sown or help given to the generations to follow. Nesta both envied and admired; she revered them; yet her sharp intelligence, larger in the extended boundary of thought coming of strange crimson-lighted new knowledge, discerned in a dimness what blest conditions had fixed them on their beautiful barren eminence. Without challengeing it, she had a rebellious rush of sympathy for our evil-fortuned of the world; the creatures in the battle, the wounded, trodden, mud-stained: and it alarmed her lest she should be at heart one out of the fold.

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CHAPTER XXX
The Burden upon Nesta

She had the sympathy, nevertheless, and renewing and increasing with the pulsations of a compassion that she took for her reflective survey. The next time she saw Dartrey Fenellan, she was assured of him, as being the man who might be spoken to; and by a woman: though not by a girl; not spoken to by her. The throb of the impulse precipitating speech subsided to a dumb yearning. He noticed her look: he was unaware of the human sun in the girl's eyes taking an image of him for permanent habitation in her breast. That face of his, so clearly lined, quick, firm, with the blue smile on it like the gleam of a sword coming out of sheath, did not mean hardness, she could have vowed. O that some woman, other than the unhappy woman herself, would speak the words denied to a girl! He was the man who would hearken and help. Essential immediate help was to be given besides the noble benevolence of mind. Novel ideas of manliness and the world's need for it were printed on her understanding. For what could women do in aid of a good cause! She fawned: she deemed herself very despicably her hero's inferior. The thought of him enclosed her. In a prison, the gaoler is a demi-God —hued bright or black, as it may be; and, by the present arrangement between the sexes, she, whom the world allowed not to have an intimation from eye or ear, or from nature's blood-ripeness in commune with them, of certain matters, which it suffers to be notorious, necessarily directed her appeal almost in worship to the man, who was the one man endowed to relieve, and who locked her mouth for shame.

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CHAPTER XXX
The Burden upon Nesta

Thus was she, too, being put into her woman's harness of the bit and the blinkers, and taught to know herself for the weak thing, the gentle parasite, which the fiction of our civilization expects her, caressingly and contemptuously, to become in the active, while it is exacted of her — O Comedy of Clowns! — that in the passive she be a rock-fortress impregnable, not to speak of magically encircled. She must also have her feelings; she must not be an unnatural creature. And she must have a sufficient intelligence; for her stupidity does not flatter the possessing man. It is not an organic growth that he desires in his mate, but a happy composition. You see the world which comes of the pair.

This burning Nesta, Victor's daughter, tempered by Nataly's milder blood, was a girl in whom the hard shocks of the knowledge of life, perforce of the hardness upon pure metal, left a strengthening for generous imagination. She did not sit to brood on her injured senses or set them through speculation touching heat; they were taken up and consumed by the fire of her mind. Nor had she leisure for the abhorrences, in a heart all flowing to give aid, and uplift and restore. Self was as urgent in her as in most of the young; but the gift of humour, which had previously diverted it, was now the quick feeling for her sisterhood, through the one piteous example she knew; and broadening it, through her insurgent abasement on their behalf, which was her scourged pride of sex. She but faintly thought of blaming the men whom her soul besought for justice, for common kindness, to women. There was the

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danger, that her aroused young ignorance would charge the whole of the misery about and abroad upon the stronger of those two: and another danger, that the vision of the facts below the surface would discolour and disorder her views of existence. But she loved, she sprang to, the lighted world; and she had figures of male friends, to which to cling; and they helped in animating the glorious historical figures on the world's library-shelves or under yet palpitating earth. Promise of a steady balance of her nature, too, was shown in the absence of any irritable urgency to be doing, when her bosom bled to help. Beyond the resolve, that she would not abandon the woman who had made confession to her, she formed no conscious resolutions. Far ahead down her journey of the years to come, she did see muffled things she might hope and would strive to do. They were chrysalis shapes. Above all, she flew her blind quickened heart on the wings of an imaginative force; and those of the young who can do that, are in their blood incorruptible by dark knowledge, irradiated under darkness in the mind. Let but the throb be kept for others. That is the one secret, for redemption, if not for preservation.

Victor descended on his marine London to embrace his girl, full of regrets at Fredi's absence from the great whirl 'overhead,' as places of multitudinous assembly, where he shone, always appeared to him. But it was not to last long; she would soon be on the surface again! At the first clasp of her, he chirped some bars of her song. He challenged her to duet before the good ladies, and she kindled, she was

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CHAPTER XXX
The Burden upon Nesta

caught up by his gaiety, wondering at herself; faintly aware of her not being spontaneous. And she made her father laugh, just in the old way; and looked at herself in his laughter, with the thought, that she could not have become so changed; by which the girl was helped to jump to her humour. Victor turned his full front to Dorothea and Virginia, one sunny beam of delight: and although it was Mr. Stuart Rem who was naughty Nesta's victim, and although it seemed a trespass on her part to speak in such a manner of a clerical gentleman, they were seized; they were the opposite partners of a laughing quadrille, lasting till they were tired out.

Victor had asked his girl, if she sang on a Sunday. The ladies remembered, that she had put the question for permission to Mr. Stuart Rem, who was opposed to secular singing.

'And what did he say?' said Victor.

Nesta shook head: 'It was not what he said, papa; it was his look. His duty compelled him, though he loves music. He had the look of a Patriarch putting his handmaiden away into the desert.'

Dorothea and Virginia, in spite of protests within, laughed to streams. They recollected the look; she had given the portrait of Mr. Stuart Rem in the act of repudiating secular song.

Victor conjured up a day when this darling Fredi, a child, stood before a famous picture in the Brera, at Milan: when he and her mother noticed the child's very studious graveness; and they had talked of it; he remarking, that she disapproved of the Patriarch; and Nataly, that she was taken with Hagar's face.

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He seemed surprised at her not having heard from Dudley.

'How is that?' said he.

'Most probably because he has not written, papa.'

He paused after the cool reply. She had no mournful gaze at all; but in the depths of the clear eyes he knew so well, there was a coil of something animate, whatever it might be. And twice she drew a heavy breath.

He mentioned it in London. Nataly telegraphed at night for her girl to meet her next day at Dartrey's hotel.

Their meeting was incomprehensibly joyless to the hearts of each, though it was desired, and had long been desired, and mother was mother, daughter daughter, without diminution of love between them. They held hands, they kissed and clasped, they showered their tender phrases with full warm truth, and looked into eyes and surely saw one another. But the heart of each was in a battle of its own, taking wounds or crying for supports. Whether to speak to her girl at once, despite the now vehement contrary counsel of Victor, was Nataly's deliberation, under the thought of the young creature's perplexity in not seeing her at the house of the Duvidney ladies: while Nesta conjured in a flash the past impressions of her mother's shrinking distaste from any such hectic themes as this which burdened and absorbed her; and she was almost joining to it, through sympathy with any thought or feeling of one in whom she had such pride; she had the shudder of revulsion. Further, Nataly put on rather cravenly an air of distress, or she half designingly permitted

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CHAPTER XXX
The Burden upon Nesta

her trouble to be seen, by way of affecting her girl's recollection when the confession was to come, that Nesta might then understand her to have been restrained from speaking, not evasive of her duty. The look was interpreted by Nesta as belonging to the social annoyances dating, in her calendar, from Creckholt, apprehensively dreaded at Lakelands. She hinted asking, and her mother nodded; not untruthfully; but she put on a briskness after the nod; and a doubt was driven into Nesta's bosom.

Her dear Skepsey was coming down to her for a holiday, she was glad to hear. Of Dudley, there was no word. Nataly shunned his name, with a superstitious dread lest any mention of him should renew pretensions that she hoped, and now supposed, were quite withdrawn. So she had told poor Mr. Barmby only yesterday, at his humble request to know. He had seen Dudley on the pantiles, walking with a young lady, he said. And 'he feared,' he said; using a pardonable commonplace of deceit. Her compassion accounted for the 'fear' which was the wish, and caused her not to think it particularly strange, that he should imagine Dudley to have quitted the field. Now that a disengaged Dartrey Fenellan was at hand, poor Mr. Barmby could have no chance.

Dartrey came to her room by appointment. She wanted to see him alone, and he informed her, that Mrs. Blathenoy was in the hotel, and would certainly receive and amuse Nesta for any length of time.

'I will take her up,' said Nataly, and rose, and she sat immediately, and fluttered a hand at her breast. She laughed: 'Perhaps I'm tired!'

Dartrey took Nesta.

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CHAPTER XXX
The Burden upon Nesta

He returned, saying: 'There's a lift in the hotel. Do the stairs affect you at all?'

She fenced his sharp look. 'Laziness, I fancy; age is coming on. How is it Mrs. Blathenoy is here?'

'Well! how?'

'Foolish curiosity?'

'I think I have made her of service. I did not bring the lady here.'

'Of service to whom?'

'Why, to Victor!'

'Has Victor commissioned you?'

'You can bear to hear it. Her husband knows the story. He has a grudge . . . commercial reasons. I fancy it is, that Victor stood against his paper at the table of the Bank. Blathenoy vowed blow for blow. But I think the little woman holds him in. She says she does.'

'Victor prompted you?'

'It occurred as it occurred.'

'She does it for love of us?—Oh! I can't trifle. Dartrey!'

'Tell me.'

'First, you haven't let me know what you think of my Nesta.'

'She's a dear good girl.'

'Not so interesting to you as a flighty little woman!'

'She has a speck of some sort on her mind.'

Nataly spied at Dudley's behaviour, and said: 'That will wear away. Is Mr. Blathenoy much here?'

'As often as he can come, I believe.'

'That is . . .?'

'I have seen him twice.'

'His wife remains?'

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CHAPTER XXX
The Burden upon Nesta

'Fixed here for the season.'

'My friend!'

'No harm, no harm!'

'But—to her!'

'You have my word of honour.'

'Yes: and she is doing you a service, at your request; and you occasionally reward her with thanks; and she sees you are a man of honour. Do you not know women?'

Dartrey blew his pooh-pooh on feminine suspicions. 'There's very little left of the Don Amoroso in me. Women don't worship stone figures.'

'They do:—like the sea-birds. And what do you say to me, Dartrey?—I can confess it: I am one of them: I love you. When last you left England, I kissed your hand. It was because of your manly heart in that stone figure. I kept from crying: you used to scorn us English for the "whimpering fits" you said we enjoy and must have—in books, if we can't get them up for ourselves. I could have prayed to have you as brother or son. I love my Victor the better for his love of you. Oh!—poor soul!—how he is perverted since that building of Lakelands! He cannot take soundings of the things he does. Formerly he confided in me, in all things: now not one;—I am the chief person to deceive. If only he had waited! We are in a network of intrigues and schemes, every artifice, in London—tempting one to hate simple worthy people, who naturally have their views, and see me an impostor, and tolerate me, fascinated by him:—or bribed—it has to be said. There are ways of bribeing. I trust he may not have in the end to pay too heavily for succeeding. He

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seems a man pushed by Destiny; not irresponsible, but less responsible than most. He is desperately tempted by his never failing. Whatever he does! . . . it is true! And it sets me thinking of those who have never had an ailment, up to a certain age, when the killing blow comes. Latterly I have seen into him: I never did before. Had I been stronger, I might have saved, or averted . . . But, you will say, the stronger woman would not have occupied my place. I must have been blind too. I did not see, that his nature shrinks from the thing it calls up. He dreads the exposure he courts—or has to combat with all his powers. It has been a revelation to me of him—life as well. Nothing stops him. Now it is Parliament—a vacant London Borough. He counts on a death: Ah! terrible! I have it like a snake's bite night and day.'

Nataly concluded: 'There: it has done me some good to speak. I feel so base.' She breathed heavily.

Dartrey took her hand and bent his lips to it. 'Happy the woman who has not more to speak! How long will Nesta stay here?'

'You will watch over her, Dartrey? She stays—her father wishes—up to . . . ah! We can hardly be in such extreme peril. He has her doctor, her lawyer, and her butler—a favourite servant—to check, and influence, her. She—you know who it is!—does not, I am now convinced, mean persecution. She was never a mean-minded woman. Oh! I could wish she were. They say she is going. Then I am to be made an "honest woman of." Victor wants Nesta, now that she is away, to stay until . . . You understand. He

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CHAPTER XXX
The Burden upon Nesta

feels she is safe from any possible kind of harm with those good ladies. And I feel she is the safer for having you near. Otherwise, how I should pray to have you with us! Daily I have to pass through, well, something like the ordeal of the red-hot ploughshares —and without the innocence, dear friend! But it's best that my girl should not have to be doing the same; though she would have the innocence. But she writhes under any shadow of a blot. And for her to learn the things that are in the world, through her mother's history!—and led to know it by the falling away of friends, or say, acquaintances! However ignorant at present, she learns from a mere nothing. I dread! . . . In a moment, she is a blaze of light. There have been occurrences. Only Victor could have overcome them! I had to think it better for my girl, that she was absent. We are in such a whirl up there! So I work round again to "how long?" and the picture of myself counting the breaths of a dying woman. The other day I was told I was envied!'

'Battle, battle, battle;—for all of us, in every position!' said Dartrey sharply, to clip a softness: 'except when one's attending on an invalid uncle. Then it's peace; rather like extinction. And I can't be crying for the end either. I bite my moustache and tap foot on the floor, out of his hearing; make believe I'm patient. Now I'll fetch Nesta.'

Mrs. Blathenoy came down with an arm on Nesta's shoulder. She held a telegram, and said to Nataly: 'What can this mean? It's from my husband; he puts "Jacob": my husband's Christian name:—so like my husband, where there's no concealment! There—he says: "Down to-night else pack ready start

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CHAPTER XXX
The Burden upon Nesta

to-morrow." Can it signify, affairs are bad with my husband in the city?'

It had that signification to Nataly's understanding. At the same time, the pretty little woman's absurd lisping repetition of 'my husband' did not seem without design to inflict the wound it caused.

In reality, it was not malicious; it came of the bewitchment of a silly tongue by her knowledge of the secret to be controlled: and after contrasting her fortunes with Nataly's, on her way downstairs, she had comforted herself by saying, that at least *she* had a husband. She was not aware that she dealt a hurt until she had found a small consolation in the indulgence: for Captain Dartrey Fenellan admired this commanding figure of a woman, who could not legally say that which the woman he admired less, if at all, legally could say.

'I must leave you to interpret,' Nataly remarked.

Mrs. Blathenoy resented her unbefitting queenly style. For this reason, she abstained from an intended leading up to mention of the 'singular-looking lady' seen riding with Miss Radnor more than once; and as to whom, Miss Radnor (for one gives her the name) had not just now, when questioned, spoken very clearly. So the mother's alarms were not raised.

And really it was a pity, Mrs. Blathenoy said to Dartrey subsequently; finding him colder than before Mrs. Radnor's visit; it was a pity, because a young woman in Miss Radnor's position should not by any possibility be seen in association with a person of commonly doubtful appearance.

She was denied the petulant satisfaction of rousing the championship bitter to her. Dartrey would not

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CHAPTER XXX
The Burden upon Nesta

deliver an opinion on Miss Radnor's conduct. He declined, moreover, to assist in elucidating the telegram by 'looking here,' and poring over the lines beside a bloomy cheek. He was petulantly whipped on the arm with her glove, and pouted at. And it was then—and then only or chiefly through Nataly's recent allusion—that the man of honour had his quakings in view of the quagmire, where he was planted on an exceedingly narrow causeway, not of the firmest. For she was a pretty little woman, one of the prize gifts of the present education of women to the men who are for having them quiescent domestic patterns; and her artificial ingenuousness or candid frivolities came to her by nature to kindle the nature of the gentleman on the other bank of the stream, and witch him to the plunge, so greatly mutually regretted after taken: an old duet to the moon.

Dartrey escaped to the Club, where he had a friend. The friend was Colonel Sudley, one of the modern studious officers, not in good esteem with the authorities. He had not forgiven Dartrey for the intemperateness which cut off a brilliant soldier from the service. He was reduced to acknowledge, however, that there was a sparkling defence for him to reply with, in the shape of a fortune gained: and where we have a Society forcing us to live up to an expensive level, very trying to a soldier's income, a fortune gained will offer excuses for misconduct short of disloyal or illegal. They talked of the state of the Army: we are moving. True, and at the last Review, the 'march past' was performed before a mounted generalissimo profoundly asleep, head on breast. Our English military 'moving' may now be likened to

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Somnolency on Horseback. 'Oh, come, no rancour,' said the colonel; 'you know he's a kind old boy at heart; nowhere a more affectionate man alive!'

'So the sycophants are sure of posts!'

'Come, I say! He's devoted to the Service.'

'Invalid him, and he shall have a good epitaph.

'He's not so responsible as the taxpayer.'

'There you touch home. Mother Goose can't imagine the need for defence until a hand's at her feathers.'

'What about her shrieks now and then?'

'Indigestion of a surfeit?'

They were in a laughing wrangle when two acquaintances of the colonel's came near. One of them recognized Dartrey. He changed a prickly subject to one that is generally as acceptable to the servants of Mars. His companion said: 'Who is the girl out with Judith Marsett?' He flavoured eulogies of the girl's good looks in easy garrison English. She was praised for sitting her horse well. One had met her on the parade, in the afternoon, walking with Mrs. Marsett. Colonel Sudley had seen them on horseback. He remarked to Dartrey: 'And by the way, you're a clean stretch ahead of us. I've seen you go by these windows, with the young lady on one side, and a rather pretty woman on the other too.'

'Nothing is unseen in this town!' Dartrey rejoined.

Strolling to his quarters along the breezy parade at night, he proposed to himself, that he would breathe an immediate caution to Nesta. How had she come to know this Mrs. Marsett? But he was more seriously thinking of what Colney Durance called

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CHAPTER XXX
The Burden upon Nesta

'The Mustard Plaster'; the satirist's phrase for warm relations with a married fair one: and Dartrey, clear of any design to have it at his breast, was beginning to take intimations of pricks and burns. They are an almost positive cure of inflammatory internal conditions. They were really hard on him, who had none to be cured.

The hour was nigh midnight. As he entered his hotel, the porter ran off to the desk in his box, and brought him a note, saying, that a lady had left it at half-past nine.—Left it?—Then the lady could not be the alarming lady. He was relieved. The words of the letter were cabalistic; these, beneath underlined address:—

'I beg you to call on me, if I do not see you this evening. It is urgent; you will excuse me when I explain. Not late to-morrow. I am sure you will not fail to come. I could write what would be certain to bring you. I dare not trust any names to paper.'

The signature was, Judith Marsett.

CHAPTER XXXI

Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at Times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

By the very earliest of the trains shot away to light and briny air from London's November gloom, which knows the morning through increase of gasjets, little Skepsey was hurried over suburban chimneys, in his

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at Times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

friendly third-class carriage; where we have reminders of ancient pastoral times peculiar to our country, as it may chance; but where a man may speak to his neighbour right off without being deemed offensive. That is homely. A social fellow knitting closely to his fellows when he meets them, enjoys it, even at the cost of uncushioned seats: he can, if imps are in him, merryandrew as much as he pleases; detested punctilio does not reign there; he can proselytize for the soul's welfare; decry or uphold the national drink; advertize a commercial Firm deriving prosperity from the favour of the multitude; exhort to patriotism. All is accepted. Politeness is the rule, according to Skepsey's experience of the Southern part of the third-class kingdom. And it is as well to mark the divisions, for the better knowledge of our countrymen. The North requires volumes to itself.

The hard-grained old pirate-stock Northward has built the land, and is to the front when we are at our epic work. Meanwhile it gets us a blowzy character, by shouldering roughly among the children of civilization. Skepsey, journeying one late afternoon up a Kentish line, had, in both senses of the word, encountered a long-limbed navvy; an intoxicated, he was compelled by his manly modesty to desire to think; whose loathly talk, forced upon the hearing of a decent old woman opposite him, passed baboonish behaviour; so much so, that Skepsey civilly intervened; subsequently inviting him to leave the carriage and receive a lesson at the station they were nearing. Upon his promising faithfully, that it should be a true and telling lesson, the navvy requested this pygmy spark to flick his cheek, merely to show he

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at Times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

meant war in due sincerity; and he as faithfully, all honour, promising not to let it bring about a breakage of the laws of the Company, Skepsey promptly did the deed. So they went forth.

Skepsey alluded to the incident, for an example of the lamentable deficiency in science betrayed by most of our strong men when put to it; and the bitter thought, that he could count well nigh to a certainty on the total absence of science in the long-armed navvy, whose fist on his nose might have been as the magnet of a pin, was chief among his reminiscences after the bout, destroying pleasure for the lover of Old England's might. One blow would have sent Skepsey travelling. He was not seriously struck once. They parted, shaking hands; the navvy confessing himself to have 'drunk a drop'; and that perhaps accounted for his having been 'topped by a dot on him.'

He declined to make oath never to repeat his offence; but said, sending his vanquisher to the deuce, with an amicable push at his shoulder, 'Damned if I ever forget five foot five stretched six foot flat!'

Skepsey counted his feet some small amount higher; but our hearty rovers' sons have their ballad moods when giving or taking a thrashing. One of the third-class passengers, a lad of twenty, became Skepsey's pupil, and turned out clever with the gloves, and was persuaded to enter the militia, and grew soon to be a corporal. Thus there was profit of the affair, though the navvy sank out of sight. Let us hope and pray he will not insult the hearing of females again. If only females knew how necessary it is, for their sakes, to be able to give a lesson now

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at Times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

and then! Ladies are positively opposed. And Judges too, who dress so like them. The manhood of our country is kept down, in consequence. Mr. Durance was right, when he said something about the state of war being wanted to weld our races together: and yet we are always praying for the state of peace, which causes cracks and gaps among us! Was that what he meant by illogical? It seemed to Skepsey—oddly, considering his inferior estimate of the value of the fair sex—that a young woman with whom he had recently made acquaintance; and who was in Brighton now, upon missionary work; a member of the 'Army,' an officer of advancing rank, Matilda Pridden, by name; was nearer to the secret of the right course of conduct for individual citizens and the entire country than any gentleman he knew.

Yes, nearer to it than his master was! Thinking of Mr. Victor Radnor, Skepsey fetched a sigh. He had knocked at his master's door at the office one day, and imagining the call to enter, had done so, and had seen a thing he could not expunge. Lady Grace Halley was there. From matters he gathered, Skepsey guessed her to be working for his master among the great folks, as he did with Jarniman, and Mr. Fenellan with Mr. Carling. But is it usual, he asked himself—his natural veneration framing the rebuke to his master thus—to repay the services of a lady so warmly?—We have all of us an ermined owl within us to sit in judgement of our superiors as well as our equals; and the little man, notwithstanding a servant's bounden submissiveness, was forced to hear the judicial pronouncement upon his master's behaviour. His master had, at the same

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

time, been saying most weighty kind words more and more of late: one thing:—that, if he gave all he had to his fellows, and did all he could, he should still be in their debt. And he was a very wealthy gentleman. What are we to think? The ways of our superiors are wonderful. We do them homage: still we feel, we painfully feel, we are beginning to worship elsewhere. It is the pain of a detachment of the very roots of our sea-weed heart from a rock. Mr. Victor Radnor was an honour to his country. Skepsey did not place the name of Matilda Pridden beside it or in any way compare two such entirely different persons. At the same time and most earnestly, while dreading to hear, he desired to have Matilda Pridden's opinion of the case distressing him. He never could hear it, because he could never be allowed to expound the case to her. Skepsey sighed again: he as much as uttered: Oh, if we had a few thousands like her!—But what if we do have them? They won't marry! There they are, all that the country requires in wives and mothers; and like Miss Priscilla Graves, they won't marry!

He looked through sad thoughts across the benches of the compartments to the farther end of the carriage, where sat the Rev. Septimus Barmby, looking at him through a meditation as obscure if not so mournful. Few are the third-class passengers outward at that early hour in the winter season, and Skepsey's gymnastics to get beside the Rev. Septimus were unimpeded; though a tight-packed carriage of us poor journaliers would not have obstructed them with as much as a sneer. Mr. Barmby and Skepsey

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at Times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

greeted. The latter said, he had a holiday, to pay a visit to Miss Nesta. The former said, he hoped he should see Miss Nesta. Skepsey then rapidly brought the conversation to a point where Matilda Pridden was comprised. He discoursed of the 'Army' and her position in the Army, giving instances of her bravery, the devotion shown by her to the cause of morality, in all its forms. Mr. Barmby had his fortunes in his hands at the moment, he could not lend an attentive ear; and he disliked this Army, the title it had taken, and the mixing of women and men in its ranks; not to speak of a presumption in its proceedings, and the public marching and singing. Moreover, he enjoyed his one or two permissible glasses: he doubted that the Chiefs of the Army had common benevolence for the inoffensive pipe. But the cause of morality was precious to him; morality and a fit of softness, and the union of the happiest contrast of voices, had set him for a short while, before the dawn of Nesta's day, hankering after Priscilla Graves. Skepsey's narrative of Matilda Pridden's work down at the East of London, was effective; it had the ring to thrill a responsive chord in Mr. Barmby, who mused on London's East, and martyrly service there. His present expectations were of a very different sort; but a beautiful bride, bringing us wealth, is no misleading beam, if we direct the riches rightly. Septimus, a solitary minister in those grisly haunts of the misery breeding vice, must needs accomplish less than a Septimus the husband of one of England's chief heiresses:—only not the most brilliant, owing to circumstances known to the Rev. Groseman Buttermore: strangely, and opportunely, revealed: for her

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at Times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

exceeding benefit, it may be hoped. She is no longer the ignorant girl, to reject the protecting hand of one whose cloth is the best of cloaking. A glance at Dudley Sowerby's defection, assures our worldly wisdom too, that now is the time to sue.

Several times while Mr. Barmby made thus his pudding of the desires of the flesh and the spirit, Skepsey's tales of Matilda Pridden's heroism caught his attention. He liked her deeds; he disliked the position in which the young woman placed herself to perform them; and he said so. Women are to be *women*, he said.

Skepsey agreed: 'If we could get men to do the work, sir!'

Mr. Barmby was launching forth: Plenty of men! —His mouth was blocked by the reflection, that we count the men on our fingers; often are we, as it were, an episcopal thumb surveying scarce that number of followers! He diverged to censure of the marchings and the street-singing: the impediment to traffic, the annoyance to a finely musical ear. He disapproved altogether of Matilda Pridden's military display, pronouncing her to be, 'Doubtless a worthy young person.'

'Her age is twenty-seven,' said Skepsey, spying at the number of his own.

'You have known her long?' Mr. Barmby asked.

'Not long, sir. She has gone through trouble. She believes very strongly in the will:—If I *will* this, if I *will* that, and it is the right will, not wickedness, it is done—as good as done; and force is quite superfluous. In her sermons, she exhorts to prayer before action.'

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'Preaches?'

'She moves a large assembly, sir.'

CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at Times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

'It would seem, that England is becoming Americanized!' exclaimed the Conservative in Mr. Barmby. Almost he groaned; and his gaze was fish-like in vacancy, on hearing the little man speak of the present intrepid forwardness of the sex to be publicly doing. It is for men the most indigestible fact of our century: one that by contrast throws an overearthly holiness on our decorous dutiful mothers, who contentedly worked below the surface while men unremittingly attended to their interests above.

Skepsey drew forth a paper-covered shilling-book: a translation from the French, under a yelling title of savage hate of Old England and cannibal glee at her doom. Mr. Barmby dropped his eyelashes on it, without comment; nor did he reply to Skepsey's forlorn remark: 'We let them think they could do it!'

Behold the downs. Breakfast is behind them. Miss Radnor likewise: if the poor child has a name. We propose to supply the deficiency. She does not declare war upon tobacco. She has a cultured and a beautiful voice. We abstain from enlargeing on the charms of her person. She has resources, which representatives of a rival creed would plot to secure.

'Skepsey, you have your quarters at the house of Miss Radnor's relatives?' said Mr. Barmby, as they emerged from tunnelled chalk. 'Mention, that I think of calling in the course of the day.'

A biscuit had been their breakfast without a name. They parted at the station, roused by the smell of salt to bestow a more legitimate title on the day's

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

restorative beginning. Down the hill, along by the shops, and Skepsey, in sight of Miss Nesta's terrace, considered it still an early hour for a visitor; so, to have the sea about him, he paid pier-money, and hurried against the briny wings of a South-wester; green waves, curls of foam, flecks of silver, under low-flying grey-dark cloud-curtains shaken to a rift, where at one shot the sun had a line of Nereïds nodding, laughing, sparkling to him. Skepsey enjoyed it, at the back of thoughts military and naval. Visible sea, this girdle of Britain, inspired him to exultations in reverence. He wished Mr. Durance could behold it now and have such a breastful. He was wishing he knew a song of Britain and sea, rather fancying Mr. Durance to be in some way a bar to patriotic poetical recollection, when he saw his Captain Dartrey mounting steps out of an iron anatomy of the pier, and looking like a razor off a strap.

'Why, sir!' cried Skepsey.

'Just a plunge and a dozen strokes,' Dartrey said; 'and you'll come to my hotel and give me ten minutes of the "recreation"; and if you don't come willingly, I shall insult your country.'

'Ah! I wish Mr. Durance were here,' Skepsey rejoined.

'It would upset his bumboat of epigrams. He rises at ten o'clock to a queasy breakfast by candlelight, and proceeds to composition. His picture of the country is a portrait of himself by the artist.'

'But, sir, Captain Dartrey, you don't think as Mr. Durance does of England!'

'There are lots to flatter her, Skepsey! A drilling can't do her harm. You're down to see Miss Nesta.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at Times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

Ladies don't receive quite so early. And have you breakfasted? Come on with me quick.' Dartrey led him on, saying: 'You have an eye at my stick. It was a legacy to me, by word of mouth, from a seaman of a ship I sailed in, who thought I had done him a service; and he died after all. He fell overboard drunk. He perished of the villain stuff. One of his messmates handed me the stick in Cape Town, sworn to deliver it. A good knot to grasp; and it's flexible and strong; stick or rattan, whichever you please; it gives point or caresses the shoulder; there's no break in it, whack as you may. They call it a Demerara supple-jack. I'll leave it to you.'

Skepsey declared his intention to be the first to depart. He tried the temper of the stick, bent it a bit, and admired the prompt straightening.

'It would give a good blow, sir.'

'Does its business without braining.'

Perhaps for the reason, that it was not a handsome instrument for display on fashionable promenades, Dartrey chose it among his collection by preference; as ugly dogs of a known fidelity are chosen for companions. The Demerara supple-jack surpasses bull-dogs in its fashion of assisting the master; for when once at it, the clownish-looking thing reflects upon him creditably, by developing a refined courtliness of style, while in no way showing a diminution of jolly ardour for the fray. It will deal you the stroke of a bludgeon with the playfulness of a cane. It bears resemblance to those accomplished natural actors, who conversationally present a dramatic situation in two or three spontaneous flourishes, and are

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at Times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

themselves again, men of the world, the next minute.

Skepsey handed it back. He spoke of a new French rifle. He mentioned, in the form of query for no answer, the translation of the barking little volume he had shown to Mr. Barmby: he slapped at his breast-pocket, where it was. Not a ship was on the sea-line; and he seemed to deplore that vacancy.

'But it tells both ways,' Dartrey said. 'We don't want to be hectoring in the Channel. All we want, is to be sure of our power, so as not to go hunting and fawning for alliances. Up along that terrace Miss Nesta lives. Brighton would be a choice place for a landing.'

Skepsey temporized, to get his national defences, by pleading the country's love of peace.

'Then you give-up your portion of the gains of war —an awful disgorgement,' said Dartrey. 'If you are really for peace, you toss all your spare bones to the war-dogs. Otherwise, Quakerly preaching is taken for hypocrisy.'

'I'm afraid we are illogical, sir,' said Skepsey, adopting one of the charges of Mr. Durance, to elude the abominable word.

'In you run, my friend.' Dartrey sped him up the steps of the hotel.

A little note lay on his breakfast-table. His invalid uncle's valet gave the morning's report of the night.

The note was from Mrs. Blathenoy: she begged Captain Dartrey, in double underlinings of her brief words, to mount the stairs. He debated, and he went.

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

She was excited, and showed a bosom compressed to explode: she had been weeping. 'My husband is off. He bids me follow him. What would you have me do?'

'Go.'

'You don't care what may happen to your friends, the Radnors?'

'Not at the cost of your separation from your husband.'

'You have seen him!'

'Be serious.'

'Oh, you cold creature! You know—you see: I can't conceal. And you tell me to go. "Go!" Gracious heavens! I've no claim on you; I haven't been able to do much; I would have—never mind! believe me or not. And now I'm to *go*: on the spot, I suppose. You've seen the man I'm to go to, too. I would bear it, if it were not away from . . . out of sight of—— I'm a fool of a woman, I know. There's frankness for you! and I could declare you're saying "impudence" in your heart—or what you have for one. Have you one?'

'My dear soul, it's a flint. So just think of your duty.' Dartrey played the horrid part of executioner with some skill.

Her bosom sprang to descend into abysses.

'And never a greater fool than when I sent for you to see such a face as I'm showing!' she cried, with lips that twitched and fingers that plucked at her belt. 'But you might feel my hatred of being tied to—dragged about over the Continent by that . . . perhaps you think a woman is not sensible of vulgarity in her husband! I'm bothering you? I don't say I have

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

the gallant spirit of his naughty adolescence. 'Come to me—will you?—apply to me, if there's ever any need. I happen to have money. And forgive me for naming it.'

She groaned: 'Don't! I'm sure, and I thought it from the first, you're one of the good men, and the woman who meets you is lucky, and wretched, and so she ought to be! Only to you should I! . . . do believe that! I won't speak of what excuses I've got. You've seen.'

'Don't think of them: there'll be danger in it.'

'Shall you think of me in danger?'

'Silly, silly! Don't you see you have to do with a flint! I've gone through fire. And if I were in love with you, I should start you off to your husband this blessed day.'

'And you're not the slightest wee wee bit in love with me!'

'Perfectly true; but I like you; and if we're to be hand in hand, in the time to-come, you must walk firm at present.'

'I'm to go to-day?'

'You are.'

'Without . . . one? I dare say we sha'n't meet again.'

The riddled target kicked. Dartrey contrasted Jacob Blathenoy with the fair wife, and commiseratingly exonerated her; he lashed at himself for continuing to be in this absurdest of postures, and not absolutely secure for all that. His head shook. 'Friends, you'll find best.'

'Well!' she sighed, 'I feel I'm doomed to go famished through life. There's never to be such a thing as love, for me! I can't tell you—no woman

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

could: though you 'll say I 've told enough. I shall burn with shame when I think of it. I could go on my knees to have your arms round me once. I could kill myself for saying it!—I should feel that I had one moment of real life.—I know I ought to admire you. They say a woman hates if she 's refused. I can't: I wish I were able to. I could have helped the Radnors better by staying here and threatening never to go to him unless he swore not to do them injury. He 's revengeful. Just as you like. You say "Go," and I go. There. I may kiss your hand?'

'Give me yours.'

Dartrey kissed the hand. She kissed the mark of his lips. He got himself away, by promising to see her to the train for Paris. Outside her door, he was met by the reflection, coming as a thing external, that he might veraciously and successfully have pleaded a passionate hunger for breakfast: nay, that he would have done so, if he had been downright in earnest. For she had the prettiness to cast a spell; a certain curve at the lips, a fluttering droop of the eyelids, a corner of the eye, that led long distances away to forests and nests. This little woman had the rosy-peeping June bud's plumpness. What of the man who refused to kiss her once? Cold antecedent immersion had to be thanked; and stringent vacuity; perhaps a spotting ogre-image of her possessor. Some sense of right-doing also, we hope. Dartrey angrily attributed his good conduct to the lowest motives. He went so far as to accuse himself of having forborne to speak of breakfast, from a sort of fascinated respect for the pitch of a situation that he despised and detested. Then again, when beginning to eat, his

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

good conduct drew on him a chorus of the jeers of all the martial comrades he had known. But he owned he would have had less excuse than they, had he taken advantage of a woman's inability, at a weak moment, to protect herself: or rather, if he had not behaved in a manner to protect her from herself. He thought of his buried wife, and the noble in the base of that poor soul; needing constantly a present helper, for the nobler to conquer. Be true man with a woman, she must be viler than the devil has yet made one, if she does not follow a strong right lead:—but be patient, of course. And the word patience here means more than most men contain. Certainly a man like Jacob Blathenoy was a mouthful for any woman: and he had bought his wife, he deserved no pity. Not? Probably not. That view, however, is unwholesome and opens on slides. Pity of his wife, too, gets to be fervidly active with her portrait, fetches her breath about us. As for condemnation of the poor little woman, her case was not unexampled, though the sudden flare of it startled rather. Mrs. Victor could read men and women closely. Yes, and Victor, when he schemed—but Dartrey declined to be throwing blame right or left. More than by his breakfast, and in a preferable direction, he was refreshed by Skepsey's narrative of the deeds of Matilda Pridden.

'The right sort of girl for you to know, Skepsey,' he said. 'The best in life is a good woman.'

Skepsey exhibited his book of the Gallic howl.

'They have their fits now and then, and they're soon over and forgotten,' Dartrey said. 'The worst of it is, that we remember.'

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CHAPTER XXXI
Shows how the Squires in a Conqueror's Service have at times to do Knightly Conquest of themselves

After the morning's visit to his uncle, he peered at half a dozen sticks in the corner of the room, grasped their handles, and selected the Demerara supple-jack, for no particular reason; the curved knot was easy to the grasp. It was in his mind, that this person signing herself Judith Marsett, might have something to say, which intimately concerned Nesta. He fell to brooding on it, until he wondered why he had not been made a trifle anxious by the reading of the note overnight. Skepsey was left at Nesta's house.

Dartrey found himself expected by the servant waiting on Mrs. Marsett.

CHAPTER XXXII

Shows how Temper may kindle Temper and an Indignant Woman get her Weapon

Judith Marsett stood in her room to receive Nesta's hero. She was flushed, and had thinned her lips for utterance of a desperate thing, after the first severe formalities.

Her aim was to preserve an impressive decorum. She was at the same time burning to speak out furious wrath, in words of savage rawness, if they should come, as a manner of slapping the world's cheek for the state to which it reduces its women; whom one of the superior creatures can insult, and laugh.

Men complaining of the 'peace which is near their extinction,' have but to shuffle with the sex; they will

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CHAPTER XXXII
Shows how Temper may kindle Temper and an Indignant Woman get her Weapon

experience as remarkable a change as if they had passed off land on to sea.

Dartrey had some flitting notion of the untamed original elements women can bring about us, in his short observant bow to Mrs. Marsett, following so closely upon the scene with Mrs. Blathenoy.

But this handsome woman's look of the dull red line of a sombre fire, that needed only stir of a breath to shoot the blaze, did not at all alarm him. He felt refreshingly strung by it.

She was discerned at a glance to be an aristocratic member of regions where the senses perpetually simmer when they are not boiling. The talk at the Club recurred to him. How could Nesta have come to know the woman? His questioning of the chapter of marvellous accidents, touched Nesta simply, as a young girl to be protected, without abhorrently involving the woman. He had his ideas of the Spirit of Woman stating her case to the One Judge, for lack of an earthly just one: a story different from that which is proclaimed pestilential by the body of censors under conservatory glass; where flesh is delicately nurtured, highly prized; spirit not so much so; and where the pretty tricking of the flesh is taken for a spiritual ascendency.

In spite of her turbulent breast's burden to deliver, Mrs. Marsett's feminine acuteness was alive upon Dartrey, confirming here and there Nesta's praises of him. She liked his build and easy carriage of a muscular frame: her Ned was a heavy man. More than Dartrey's figure, as she would have said, though the estimate came second, she liked his manner with her. Not a doubt was there, that he read her position.

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CHAPTER XXXII
Shows how Temper may kindle Temper and an Indignant Woman get her Weapon

She could impose upon some: not upon masculine eyes like these. They did not scrutinize, nor ruffle a smooth surface with a snap at petty impressions; and they were not cynically intimate or dominating or tentatively amorous; clear good fellowship was in them. And it was a blessedness (whatever might be her feeling later, when she came to thank him at heart) to be in the presence of a man whose appearance breathed of offering her common ground, whereon to meet and speak together, unburdened by the hunting world, and by the stoneing world. Such common ground seems a kind of celestial to the better order of those excluded from it.

Dartrey relieved her midway in a rigid practice of the formalities: 'I think I may guess that you have something to tell me relating to Miss Radnor?'

'It is.' Mrs. Marsett gathered up for an immediate plunge, and deferred it. 'I met her—we went out with the riding-master. She took to me. I like her—I could say' (the woman's voice dropped dead low, in a tremble), 'I love her. She is young:—I could kneel to her. Do you know a Major Worrell?'

'Worrell? no.'

'He is a—calls himself a friend of my—of Captain Marsett's. He met us out one day.'

'He permitted himself to speak to Miss Radnor?'

She rejoiced in Dartrey's look. 'Not then. First let me tell you. I can hardly tell you. But Miss Radnor tells me you are not like other men. You have made your conclusions already. Are you asking what right I had to be knowing her? It is her goodness. Accident began it; I did not deceive her; as soon as ever I could I—I have Captain Marsett's

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CHAPTER XXXII
Shows how Temper may kindle Temper and an Indignant Woman get her Weapon

promise to me: at present he's situated, he—but I opened my heart to her: as much as a woman can. It came! Did I do very wrong?'

'I'm not here to decide: continue, pray.'

Mrs. Marsett aimed at formal speech, and was driving upon her natural in anger. 'I swear I did it for the best. She is an innocent girl . . . young lady: only she has a head; she soon reads things. I saw the kind of cloud in her. I spoke. I felt bound to: she said she would not forsake me.—I was bound to! And it was enough to break my heart, to think of her despising me. No, she forgave, pitied; she was kind. Those are the angels who cause us to think of changeing. I don't care for sermons, but when I meet charity:—I won't bore you!'

'You don't.'

'My . . . Captain Marsett can't bear—he calls it Psalmody. He thinks things ought always to be as they are, with women and men; and women preachers he does detest. She is not one to preach. You are waiting to hear what I have to tell. That man Major Worrell has tried to rob me of everything I ever had to set a value on:—love, I'd say;—he laughs at a woman like me loving.'

Dartrey nodded, to signify a known sort of fellow.

'She came here.' Mrs. Marsett's tears had risen. 'I ought not to have let her come. I invited her—for once: I am lonely. None of my sex—none I could respect! I meant it for only once. She promised to sing to me. And, Oh! how she sings! You have heard her. My whole heart came out. I declare I believe girls exist who can hear our way of life—and I'm not so bad except compared with that

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CHAPTER XXXII
Shows how Temper may kindle Temper and an Indignant Woman get her Weapon

angel, who heard me, and was and is, I could take oath, no worse for it. Some girls can; she is one. I am all for bringing them up in complete innocence. If I was a great lady, my daughters should never know anything of the world until they were married. But Miss Radnor is a young lady who cannot be hurt. She is above us. Oh! what a treasure for a man!—and my God! for any man born of woman to insult a saint, as she is!—He is a beast!'

'Major Worrell met her here?'

'Blame me as much as you like: I do myself. Half my rage with him is at myself for putting her in the way of such a beast to annoy. Each time she came, I said it was to be the last. I let her see what a mercy from heaven she was to me. She would come. It has not been many times. She wishes me either to . . . Captain Marsett has promised. And nothing seems hard to me when my own God's angel is by. She is! I'm not such a bad woman, but I never before I knew her knew the meaning of the word virtue. There is the young lady that man worried with his insulting remarks! though he must have known she was a lady:—because he found her in my rooms.'

'You were present when, as you say, he insulted her?'

'I was. Here it commenced; and he would see her downstairs.'

'You heard?'

'Of course, I never left her.'

'Give me a notion . . .'

'To get her to make an appointment: to let him conduct her home.'

She was alone?'

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CHAPTER XXXII
Shows how Temper may kindle Temper and an Indignant Woman get her Weapon

'Her maid was below.'

'And this happened . . .?'

'Yesterday, after dark. My Ned—Captain Marsett encourages him to be familiar. I should be the lowest of women if I feared the threats of such a reptile of a man. I could tell you more. I can't always refuse his visits, though if Ned knew the cur he is! Captain Marsett is easy-going.'

'I should like to know where he lives.'

She went straight to the mantelpiece, and faced about with a card, handing it, quite aware that it was a charge of powder.

Desperate things to be done excused the desperate said; and especially they seemed a cover to the bald and often spotty language leaping out of her, against her better taste, when her temper was up.

'Somewhere not very distant,' said Dartrey, perusing. 'Is he in the town to-day, do you know?'

'I am not sure; he may be. Her name . . .'

'Have no fear. Ladies' names are safe.'

'I am anxious that she may not be insulted again.'

'Did she show herself conscious of it?'

'She stopped speaking: she looked at the door. She may come again—or never! through that man!'

'You receive him, at his pleasure?'

'Captain Marsett wishes me to. He is on his way home. He calls Major Worrell my pet spite. All I want is, not to hear of the man. I swear he came yesterday on the chance of seeing—for he forced his way up past my servant; he must have seen Miss Radnor's maid below.'

'You don't mean, that he insulted her hearing?'

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CHAPTER XXXII
Shows how Temper may kindle Temper and an Indignant Woman get her Weapon

'Oh! Captain Fenellan, you know the style.'

'Well, I thank you,' Dartrey said. 'The young lady is the daughter of my dearest friends. She's one of the precious—you're quite right. Keep the tears back.'

'I will.' She heaved open-mouthed to get physical control of the tide. 'When you say that of her!—how can I help it? It's I fear, because I fear . . . and I've no right to expect ever . . . but if I'm never again to look on that dear face, tell her I shall—I shall pray for her in my grave. Tell her she has done all a woman can, an angel can, to save my soul. I speak truth: my very soul! I could never go to the utter bad after knowing her. I don't—you know the world—I'm a poor helpless woman!—don't swear to give up my Ned if he does break the word he promised once; I can't see how I could. I haven't her courage. I haven't—what it is!—You know her: it's in her eyes and her voice. If I had her beside me, then I could starve or go to execution—I could, I am certain. Here I am, going to do what you men hate. Let me sit.'

'Here's a chair,' said Dartrey. 'I've no time to spare; good day, for the present. You will permit me to call.'

'Oh! come'; she cried, out of her sobs, for excuse. They were genuine, or she would better have been able to second her efforts to catch a distinct vision of his retreating figure.

She beheld him, when he was in the street, turn for the district where Major Worrell had his lodgeings. That set her mind moving, and her tears fell no longer.

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CHAPTER XXXII Shows how Temper may kindle Temper and an Indignant Woman get her Weapon

Major Worrell was not at home. Dartrey was informed that he might be at his Club.

At the Club he heard of the major as having gone to London and being expected down in the afternoon. Colonel Sudley named the train: an early train; the major was engaged to dine at the Club. Dartrey had information supplied to him concerning Major Worrell and Captain Marsett, also Mrs. Marsett. She had a history. Worthy citizens read the description of history with interest when the halo of Royalty is round it. They may, if their reading extends, perceive, that it has been the main turbid stream in old Mammon's train since he threw his bait for flesh. They might ask, too, whether it is likely to cease to flow while he remains potent. The lady's history was brief, and bore recital in a Club; came off quite honourably there. Regarding Major Worrell, the tale of him showed him to have a pass among men. He managed cleverly to get his pleasures out of a small income and a 'fund of anecdote.' His reputation indicated an anecdotist of the table, prevailing in the primitive societies, where the art of conversing does not come by nature, and is exercised in monosyllabic undertones or grunts until the narrator's well-masticated popular anecdote loosens a digestive laughter, and some talk ensues. He was Marsett's friend, and he boasted of not letting Ned Marsett make a fool of himself.

Dartrey was not long in shaping the man's character: Worrell belonged to the male birds of upper air, who mangle what female prey they are forbidden to devour. And he had Miss Radnor's name: he had spoken her name at the Club overnight. He had

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CHAPTER XXXII
Shows how Temper may kindle Temper and an Indignant Woman get her Weapon

roused a sensation, because of a man being present, Percy Southweare, who was related to a man as good as engaged to marry her. The major never fell into a quarrel with sons of nobles, if he could help it, or there might have been a pretty one.

So Colonel Sudley said.

Dartrey spoke musing: 'I don't know how he may class me; I have an account to square with him.'

'It won't do in these days, my good friend. Come and cool yourself; and we'll lunch here. I sha'n't leave you.'

'By all means. We'll lunch, and walk up to the station, and you will point him out to me.'

Dartrey stated Major Worrell's offence. The colonel was not astonished; but evidently he thought less of Worrell's behaviour to Miss Radnor in Mrs. Marsett's presence than of the mention of her name at the Club: and that, he seemed to think, had a shade of excuse against the charge of monstrous. He blamed the young lady who could go twice to visit a Mrs. Marsett; partly exposed a suspicion of her. Dartrey let him talk. They strolled along the parade, and were near the pier.

Suddenly saying: 'There, beside our friend in clerical garb: here she comes; judge if that is the girl for the foulest of curs to worry, no matter where she's found,' Dartrey directed the colonel's attention to Nesta and Mr. Barmby turning off the pier and advancing.

He saluted. She bowed. There was no contraction of her eyelids; and her face was white. The mortal life appeared to be deadened in her cold wide look;

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CHAPTER XXXII Shows how Temper may kindle Temper and an Indignant Woman get her Weapon

as when the storm-wind banks a leaden remoteness, leaving blown space of sky.

The colonel said: 'No, that's not the girl a gentleman would offend.'

'What man!' cried Dartrey. 'If we had a Society for the trial of your gentleman!—but he has only to call himself gentleman to get grant of licence: and your Society protects him. It won't punish, and it won't let you. But you saw her: ask yourself—what man could offend that girl!'

'Still, my friend, she ought to keep clear of the Marsetts.'

'When I meet him, I shall treat him as one out of the law.'

'You lead on to an ultimate argument with the hangman.'

'We'll dare it, to waken the old country. Old England will count none but Worrells in time. As for discreet, if you like!—the young lady might have been more discreet. She's a girl with a big heart. If we were all everlastingly discreet!'

Dartrey may have meant, that the consequence of a prolonged conformity would be the generation of stenches to shock to purgeing tempests the tolerant heavens over such smooth stagnancy. He had his ideas about movement; about the good of women, and the health of his England. The feeling of the hopelessness of pleading Nesta's conduct, for the perfect justification of it to son or daughter of our impressing conventional world — even to a friend, that friend a true man, a really chivalrous man!— drove him back in a silence upon his natural brotherhood with souls that dare do. It was a wonder, to

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CHAPTER XXXII
Shows how Temper may kindle Temper and an Indignant Woman get her Weapon

think of his finding this kinship in a woman. In a girl?—and the world holding that virgin spirit to be unclean or shadowed because its rays were shed on foul places? He clasped the girl. Her smitten clear face, the face of the second sigh after torture, bent him in devotion to her image.

The clasping and the worshipping were independent of personal ardours: quaintly mixed with semi-paternal recollections of the little 'blue butterfly' of the days at Craye Farm and Creckholt; and he had heard of Dudley Sowerby's pretensions to her hand. Nesta's youthfulness cast double age on him from the child's past. He pictured the child; pictured the girl, with her look of solitariness of sight; as in the desolate wide world, where her noble compassion for a woman had unexpectedly, painfully, almost by transubstantiation, rack-screwed her to woman's mind. And above sorrowful, holy were those eyes.

They held sway over Dartrey, and lost it some steps on; his demon temper urgeing him to strike at Major Worrell, as the cause of her dismayed expression. He was not the happier for dropping to his nature; but we proceed more easily, all of us, when the strain which lifts us a foot or two off our native level is relaxed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A Pair of Wooers

That ashen look of the rise out of death from one of our mortal wounds, was caused by deeper convulsions in Nesta's bosom than Dartrey could imagine.

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CHAPTER XXXIII
A Pair of Wooers

She had gone for the walk with Mr. Barmby, reading the omen of his tones in the request. Dorothea and Virginia would have her go. The clerical gentleman, a friend of the Rev. Abram Posterley; and one who deplored poor Mr. Posterley's infatuation; and one besides who belonged to Nesta's musical choir in London; seemed a safe companion for the child. The grand organ of Mr. Barmby's voice, too, assured them of a devout seriousness in him, that arrested any scrupulous little questions. They could not conceive his uttering the nonsensical empty stuff, compliments to their beauty and what not, which girls hear sometimes from inconsiderate gentlemen, to the having of their heads turned. Moreover, Nesta had rashly promised her father's faithful servant Skepsey to walk out with him in the afternoon; and the ladies hoped she would find the morning's walk to have been enough; good little man though Skepsey was, they were sure. But there is the incongruous for young women of station on a promenade.

Mr. Barmby headed to the pier. After pacing up and down between the briny gulls and a polka-band, he made his way forethoughtfully to the glass-sheltered seats fronting East: where, as his enthusiasm for the solemnity of the occasion excited him to say, 'We have a view of the terraces and the cliffs'; and where not more than two enwrapped invalid figures were ensconsed. Then it was, that Nesta recalled her anticipation of his possible design; forgotten by her during their talk of her dear people: Priscilla Graves and Mr. Pempton, and the Yatts, and Simeon Fenellan, Peridon and Catkin, and Skepsey likewise; and the very latest news of her mother. She wished she

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could have run before him, to spare him. He would not notice a sign. Girls must wait and hear.

It was an oratorio. She watched the long wave roll on to the sinking into its fellow; and onward again for the swell and the weariful lapse; and up at last bursting to the sheet of white. The far-heard roar and the near commingled, giving Mr. Barmby a semblance to the powers of ocean.

At the first direct note, the burden of which necessitated a pause, she petitioned him to be her friend, to think of himself as her friend.

But a vessel laden with merchandize, that has crossed wild seas for this particular port, is hardly to be debarred from discharging its goods on the quay by simple intimations of their not being wanted. We are precipitated both by the aim and the tedium of the lengthened voyage to insist that they be seen. We believe perforce in their temptingness; and should allurement fail, we fall back to the belief in our eloquence. An eloquence to expose the qualities they possess, is the testification in the promise of their excellence. She is to be induced by feeling to see it. We are asking a young lady for the precious gift of her hand. We respect her; and because of our continued respect, despite an obstruction, we have come to think we have a claim upon her gratitude; could she but be led to understand how different we are from some other men!—from one hitherto favoured among them, unworthy of this prize, however personally exalted and meritorious.

The wave of wide extension rolled and sank and rose, heaving lifeless variations of the sickly streaks on its dull green back.

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CHAPTER XXXIII A Pair of Wooers

Dudley Sowerby's defection was hinted at and accounted for, by the worldly test of worldly considerations.

What were they?—Nesta glanced.

An indistinct comparison was modestly presented, of one unmoved by worldly considerations.

But what were they? She was wakened by a lamp, and her darkness was all inflammable to it.

'Oh! Mr. Barmby, you have done me the honour to speak before; you know my answer,' she said.

'You were then subject to an influence. A false, I may say wicked, sentiment upholding celibacy.'

'My poor Louise? She never thought of influencing me. She has her views, I mine. Our friendship does not depend on a "treaty of reciprocity." We are one at heart, each free to judge and act, as it should be in friendship. I heard from her this morning. Her brother will be able to resume his military duties next month. Then she will return to me.'

'We propose!' rejoined Mr. Barmby.

Beholding the involuntary mercurial rogue-dimple he had started from a twitch at the corner of her lips, the good gentleman pursued: 'Can we dare write our designs for the month to come? Ah!—I will say—Nesta! give me the hope I beg to have. See the seriousness. You are at liberty. That other has withdrawn his pretensions. We will not blame him. He is in expectation of exalted rank. Where there is any shadow . . .!' Mr. Barmby paused on his outroll of the word; but immediately, not intending to weigh down his gentle hearer with the significance in it, resumed at a yet more sonorous depth: 'He is under

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the obligation to his family; an old, a venerable family. In the full blaze of public opinion! His conduct can be palliated by us, too. There is a right and wrong in minor things, independent of the higher rectitude. We pardon, we can partly support, the worldly view.'

'There is a shadow?' said Nesta; and her voice was lurefully encouraging.

He was on the footing where men are precipitated by what is within them to blunder. 'On you—no. On you personally, not at all. No. It could not be deemed so. Not by those knowing, esteeming—not by him who loves you, and would, with his name, would, with his whole strength, envelop, shield . . . certainly certainly not.'

'It is on my parents?' she said.

'But to me nothing, nothing, quite nought! To confound the innocent with the guilty! . . . and excuses may exist. We know but how little we know!'

'It is on both my parents?' she said; with a simplicity that induced him to reply: 'Before the world. But not, I repeat . . .'

The band-instruments behind the sheltering glass flourished on their termination of a waltz.

She had not heeded their playing. Now she said: 'The music is over; we must not be late at lunch'; and she stood up and moved.

He sprang to his legs and obediently stepped out: 'I shall have your answer to-day? this evening? Nesta!'

'Mr. Barmby, it will be the same. You will be kind to me in not asking me again.'

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CHAPTER XXXIII A Pair of Wooers

He spoke further. She was dumb.

Had he done ill or well for himself and for her when he named the shadow on her parents? He dwelt more on her than on himself: he would not have wounded her to win the blest affirmative. Could she have been entirely ignorant?—and after Dudley Sowerby's defection? For such it was: the Rev. Stuart Rem had declared the union between the almost designated head of the Cantor family and a young person of no name, of worse than no birth, impossible: 'absolutely and totally impossible,' he had said, in his impressive fashion, speaking from his knowledge of the family and an acquaintance with Dudley. She must necessarily have learnt why Dudley Sowerby withdrew. No parents of an attractive daughter should allow her to remain unaware of her actual position in the world. It is criminal, a reduplication of the criminality! Yet she had not spoken as one astonished. She was mysterious. Women are so: young women most of all. It is undecided still whether they do of themselves conceive principles, or should submit to an imposition of the same upon them in terrorem.—Mysterious truly, but most attractive! As Lady Bountiful of a district, she would have in her maturity the majestic stature to suit a dispensation of earthly good things. And, strangely, here she was, at this moment, rivalling to excelling all others of her sex (he verified it in the crowd of female faces passing), when they, if they but knew the facts, would visit her very appearance beside them on a common footing as an intrusion and a scandal. To us who know, such matters are indeed wonderful!

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CHAPTER XXXIII
A Pair of Wooers

Moved by reflective compassion, Mr. Barmby resumed the wooer's note, some few steps after he had responded to the salutation of Dartrey Fenellan and Colonel Sudley. She did not speak. She turned her forehead to him; and the absence of the world from her eyes chilled his tongue.

He declined the pleasure of the lunch with the Duvidney ladies. He desired to be alone, to question himself fasting, to sound the deed he had done; for he had struck on a suspicion of selfishness in it: and though Love must needs be an egoism, Love is no warrant for the doing of a hurt to the creature beloved. Thoughts upon Skepsey and the tale of his Matilda Pridden's labours in poor neighbourhoods, to which he had been inattentive during the journey down to the sea, invaded him; they were persistent. He was a worthy man, having within him the spiritual impulse curiously ready to take the place where a material disappointment left vacancy. The vulgar sort embrace the devil at that stage. Before the day had sunk, Mr. Barmby's lowest wish was, to be a light, as the instrument of his Church in her ministrations amid the haunts of sin and slime, to such plain souls as Daniel Skepsey and Matilda Pridden. And he could still be that, if Nesta, in the chapters of the future, changed her mind. She might; for her good she would; he reserved the hope. His light was one to burn beneath an extinguisher.

At the luncheon table of the Duvidney ladies, it was a pain to Dorothea and Virginia to witness how poor the appetite their Nesta brought in from the briny blowy walk. They prophesied against her chances of a good sleep at night, if she did not eat heartily.

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CHAPTER XXXIII
A Pair of Wooers

Virginia timidly remarked on her paleness. Both of them put their simple arts in motion to let her know, that she was dear to them: so dear as to make them dread the hour of parting. They named their dread of it. They had consulted in private and owned to one another, that they did really love the child, and dared not look forward to what they should do without her. The dear child's paleness and want of appetite (they remembered they were observing a weak innocent girl) suggested to them mutually the idea of a young female heart sickening, for the old unhappy maiden reason. But, if only she might return with them to the Wells, the Rev. Stuart Rem would assure her to convince her of her not being quite quite forsaken. He, or some one having sanction from Victor, might ultimately (the ladies waiting anxiously in the next room, to fold her on the warmth of their bosoms when she had heard) impart to her the knowledge of circumstances, which would, under their further tuition concerning the particular sentiments of great families and the strict duties of the scions of the race, help to account for and excuse the Hon. Dudley Sowerby's behaviour.

They went up to the drawing-room, talking of Skepsey and his tale of Miss Pridden, for Nesta's amusement. Any talk of her Skepsey usually quickened her lips to reminiscent smiles and speech. Now she held on to gazeing; and sadly, it seemed; as if some object were not present.

For a vague encouragement, Dorothea said: 'One week, and we are back home at Moorsedge!'—not so far from Cronidge, was implied, for the administering of some foolish temporary comfort. And it was as

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CHAPTER XXXIII A Pair of Wooers

when a fish on land springs its hollow sides in alien air for the sustaining element; the girl panted; she clasped Dorothea's hand and looked at Virginia: 'My mother—I must see her!' she said. They were slightly stupefied by the unwonted mention of her mother. They made no reply. They never had done so when there was allusion to her mother. Their silence now struck a gong at the girl's bosom.

Dorothea had it in mind to say, that if she thirsted for any special comfort, the friends about her would offer consolation for confidence.

Before she could speak, Perrin the footman entered, bearing the card of the Hon. Dudley Sowerby.

Mr. Dudley Sowerby begged for an immediate interview with Miss Radnor.

The ladies were somewhat agitated, but no longer perplexed as to their duties. They had quitted Moorsedge to avoid the visit of his family. If he followed, it signified that which they could not withstand:—'The Tivoli falls!' as they named the fateful tremendous human passion, from the reminiscences of an impressive day on their travels in youth; when the leaping torrent had struck upon a tale of love they were reading. They hurriedly entreated Nesta to command her nerves; peremptorily requested her to stay where she was; showed her spontaneously, by way of histrionic adjuration, the face to be worn by young ladies at greetings on these occasions; kissed her and left her; Virginia whispering: 'He is true!'

Dudley entered the drawing-room, charged with his happy burden of a love that had passed through the furnace. She stood near a window, well in the light; she hardly gave him welcome. His address to her

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CHAPTER XXXIII A Pair of Wooers

was hurried, rather uncertain, coherent enough between the drop and the catch of articulate syllables. He found himself holding his hat. He placed it on the table, and it rolled foolishly; but soon he was by her side, having two free hands to claim her one.

'You are thinking, you have not heard from me! I have been much occupied,' he said. 'My brother is ill, very ill. I have your pardon?'

'Indeed you have—if it has to be asked.'

'I have it?'

'Have I to grant it?'

'I own to remissness.'

'I did not blame you.'

'Nesta . . .!'

Her coldness was unshaken.

He repeated the call of her name. 'I should have written—I ought to have written!—I could not have expressed . . . You do forgive? So many things!'

'You come from Cronidge to-day?'

'From my family—to you.'

She seemed resentful. His omissions as a correspondent were explicable in a sentence. It had to be deferred.

Reviewing for a moment the enormous internal conflict undergone by him during the period of the silence between them, he wondered at the vastness of the love which had conquered objections, to him so poignant.

There was at least no seeing of the public blot on her birth when looking on her face. Nor when thinking of the beauty of her character, in absence or in presence, was there any. He had mastered distaste

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to such a degree, that he forgot the assistance he had received from the heiress for enabling him to appreciate the fair young girl. Money is the imperious requirement of superior station; and more money and more: in these our modern days of the merchant's wealth, and the miner's, and the gigantic American and Australian millionaires, high rank is of necessity vowed, in peril of utter eclipse, to the possession of money. Still it is, when assured, a consideration far to the rear with a gentleman in whose bosom love and the buzzing world have fought their battle out. He could believe it thoroughly fought out, by the prolonged endurance of a contest lasting many days and nights; in the midst of which, at one time, the task of writing to tell her of his withdrawal from the engagement, was the cause of his omission to write.

As to her character, he dwelt on the charm of her recovered features, to repress an indicative dread of some intrepid force behind it, that might be unfeminine, however gentle the external lineaments. Her features, her present aristocratic deficiency of colour, greatly pleased him; her character would submit to moulding. Of all young ladies in the world, she should be the one to shrink from a mental independence and hold to the guidance of the man ennobling her. Did she? Her eyes were reading him. She had her father's limpid eyes, and when they concentrated rays, they shot.

'Have you seen my parents, Mr. Sowerby?'

He answered smilingly, for reassuringly: 'I have seen them.'

'My mother?'

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CHAPTER XXXIII A Pair of Wooers

'From your mother first. But am I not to be Dudley?'

'She spoke to you? She told you?'

'And yesterday your father—a second time.'

Some remainder of suspicion in the dealing with members of this family, urged Dudley to say: 'I understood from them, you were not . . .? that you were quite . . .?'

'I have heard: I have guessed: it was recently—this morning, as it happened. I wish to go to my mother to-day. I shall go to her to-morrow.'

'I might offer to conduct you—now!'

'You are kind; I have Skepsey.' She relieved the situation of its cold-toned strain in adding: 'He is a host.'

'But I may come?—now! Have I not the right? You do not deny it me?'

'You are very generous.'

'I claim the right, then. Always. And subsequently, soon after, my mother hopes to welcome you at Cronidge. She will be glad to hear of your naming of a day. My father bids me . . . he and all our family.'

'They are very generous.'

'I may send them word this evening of a day you name?'

'No, Mr. Sowerby.'

'Dudley?'

'I cannot say it. I have to see my parents.'

'Between us, surely?'

'My whole heart thanks you for your goodness to me. I am unable to say more.'

He had again observed and he slightly crisped under

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the speculative look she directed on him: a simple unstrained look, that had an air of reading right in, and was worse to bear with than when the spark leaped upon some thought from her eyes: though he had no imagination of anything he concealed or exposed, and he would have set it down to her temporary incredulousness of his perfect generosity or power to overcome the world's opinion of certain circumstances. That had been a struggle! The peculiar look was not renewed. She spoke warmly of her gratitude. She stated, that she must of necessity see her parents at once. She submitted to his entreaty to conduct her to them on the morrow. It was in the manner of one who yielded step by step, from inability to contend.

Her attitude continuing unchanged, he became sensible of a monotony in the speech with which he assailed it, and he rose to leave, not dissatisfied. She, at his urgent request, named her train for London in the early morning. He said it was not too early. He would have desired to be warmed; yet he liked her the better for the moral sentiment controlling the physical. He had appointments with relatives or connections in the town, and on that pretext he departed, hoping for the speedy dawn of the morrow as soon as he had turned his back on the house.

No, not he the man to have pity of women underfoot!—That was the thought, unrevolved, unphrased, all but unconscious, in Nesta: and while her heart was exalting him for his generosity. Under her present sense of the chilling shadow, she felt the comfort there was in being grateful to him for the golden beams which his generosity cast about her. But she had an intelligence sharp to pierce, virgin though she was;

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CHAPTER XXXIII A Pair of Wooers

and with the mark in sight, however distant, she struck it, unerring as an Artemis for blood of beasts: those shrewd young wits, on the look-out to find a champion, athirst for help upon a desolate road, were hard as any judicial to pronounce the sentence upon Dudley in that respect. She raised him high; she placed herself low; she had a glimpse of the struggle he had gone through; love of her had helped him, she believed. And she was melted; and not the less did the girl's implacable intuition read with the keenness of eye of a man of the world the blunt division in him, where warm humanity stopped short at the wall of social concrete forming a part of this rightly esteemed young citizen. She, too, was divided: she was at his feet; and she rebuked herself for daring to judge—or rather, it was, for having a reserve in her mind upon a man proving so generous with her. She was pulled this way and that by sensibilities both inspiring to blind gratitude and quickening her penetrative view. The certainty of an unerring perception remained.

Dorothea and Virginia were seated in the room below, waiting for their carriage, when the hall-door spoke of the Hon. Dudley's departure; soon after, Nesta entered to them. She swam up to Dorothea's lap, and dropped her head on it, kneeling.

The ladies feared she might be weeping. Dorothea patted her thick brown twisted locks of hair. Unhappiness following such an interview, struck them as an ill sign.

Virginia bent to the girl's ear, and murmured: 'All well?'

She replied: 'He has been very generous.'

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Her speaking of the words renewed an oppression, that had darkened her on the descent of stairs. For sensibilities sharp as Nesta's, are not to be had without their penalties: and she who had gone nigh to summing in a flash the nature of Dudley, sank suddenly under that affliction often besetting the young adventurous mind, crushing to young women: —the fascination exercised upon them by a positive adverse masculine attitude and opinion. Young men know well what it is: and if young women have by chance overcome their timidity, to the taking of any step out of the trim pathway, they shrink, with a sense of forlornest isolation. It becomes a subjugation: inciting to revolt, but a heavy weight to cast off. Soon it assumed its material form for the contention between her and Dudley, in the figure of Mrs. Marsett. The Nesta who had been instructed to know herself to be under a shadow, heard, she almost justified Dudley's reproaches to her, for having made the acquaintance of the unhappy woman, for having visited her, for having been, though but for a minute, at the mercy of a coarse gentleman's pursuit. The recollection was a smart buffet.

Her lighted mind punished her thus through her conjuring of Dudley's words, should news of her relations with Mrs. Marsett reach him: — and she would have to tell him. Would he not say: 'I have borne with the things concerning your family. All the greater reason why I must insist . . .' he would assuredly say he insisted (her humour caught at the word, as being the very word one could foresee and clearly see him uttering in a fit of vehemence) on her immediate abandonment of 'that woman.'

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CHAPTER XXXIII A Pair of Wooers

And with Nesta's present enlightenment by dusky beams, upon her parentage, she listened abjectly to Dudley, or the opinion of the majority. Would he not say or think, that her clinging to Mrs. Marsett put them under a kind of common stamp, or gave the world its option to class them together?

These were among the ideas chasing in a head destined to be a battle-field for the enrichment of a harvest-field of them, while the girl's face was hidden on Dorothea's lap, and her breast heaved and heaved.

She distressed them when she rose, by saying she must instantly see her mother.

They saw the pain their hesitation inflicted, and Dorothea said: 'Yes, dear; any day you like.'

'To-morrow—I must go to her to-morrow!'

A suggestion of her mother's coming down, was faintly spoken by one lady, echoed in a quaver by the other.

Nesta shook her head. To quiet the kind souls, she entreated them to give their promise that they would invite her again.

Imagining the Hon. Dudley to have cast her off, both ladies embraced her: not entirely yielding-up their hearts to her, by reason of the pernicious new ideas now in the world to sap our foundations of morality; which warned them of their duty to uphold mentally his quite justifiable behaviour, even when compassionating the sufferings of the guiltless creature loved by them.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

All through the afternoon and evening Skepsey showed indifference to meals by continuing absent: and he was the one with whom Nesta would have felt at home; more at home than with her parents. He and the cool world he moved in were a transparency of peace to her mind; even to his giving of some portion of it, when she had the dear little man present to her in a vivid image of a fish in a glass-globe, wandering round and round, now and then shooting across, just as her Skepsey did: he carried his head semi-horizontally at his arrowy pace; plain to read though he was, he appeared, under that image created of him, animated by motives inducing to speculation.

She thought of him till she could have reproached him for not returning and helping her to get away from the fever of other thoughts:—this anguish twisting about her parents, and the dreadful trammels of gratitude to a man afflictingly generous, the frown of congregated people.

The latter was the least of evils; she had her charges to bring against them for injustice: uncited, unstirred charges, they were effective as a muffled force to sustain her: and the young who are of healthy lively blood and clean conscience have either emotion or imagination to fold them defensively from an enemy world; whose power to drive them forth

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CHAPTER XXXIV Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

into the wilderness they acknowledge. But in the wilderness their souls are not beaten down by breath of mortals; they burn straight flame there up to the parent Spirit.

She could not fancy herself flying thither;—where to be shorn and naked and shivering is no hardship, for the solitude clothes, and the sole true life in us resolves to that steady flame;—she was restrained by Dudley's generosity, which held her fast to have the forgiveness for her uncommitted sin dashed in her face. He surprised her; the unexpected quality in him seemed suddenly to have snared her fast: and she did not obtain release after seeing behind it;—seeing it, by the light of what she demanded, personal, shallow, a lover's generosity. So her keen intellect saw it; and her young blood (for the youthful are thus divided) thrilled in thinking it must be love! The name of the sacred passion lifted it out of the petty cabin of the individual into a quiring cathedral universal, and subdued her. It subdued her with an unwelcome touch of tenderness when she thought of it as involving tenderness for her mother, some chivalrous respect for her mother. Could he love the daughter without some little, which a more intimate knowledge of her dear mother would enlarge? The girl's heart flew to her mother, clung to her, vindicated her dumbly. It would not inquire, and it refused to hear, hungering the while. She sent forth her flights of stories in elucidation of the hidden; and they were like white bird after bird winging to covert beneath a thundercloud; until her breast ached for the voice of the thunder: harsh facts: sure as she was of her never losing her filial hold of the beloved. She

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and her mother grew together, they were one. Accepting the shadow, they were the closer one beneath it. She had neither vision nor active thought of her father, in whom her pride was.

CHAPTER XXXIV Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

At the hour of ten, the ladies retired for the enjoyment of their sweet reward. Manton, their maid, came down to sit with Nesta on the watch for Skepsey. Perrin, the footman, returning, as late as twenty minutes to eleven, from his tobacco promenade along the terrace, reported to Manton 'a row in town'; and he repeated to Nesta the policeman's opinion and his own of the 'Army' fellows, and the way to treat them. Both were for rigour.

'The name of "Army" attracts poor Skepsey so, I am sure he would join it, if they would admit him,' Nesta said.

'He has an immense respect for a young woman, who belongs to his "Army"; and one doesn't know what may have come,' said Manton.

Two or three minutes after eleven, a feeble ring at the bell gained admission for some person: whispering was heard in the passage. Manton played eavesdropper, and suddenly bursting on Skepsey, arrested him when about to dash upstairs. His young mistress's voice was a sufficient command; he yielded; he pitched a smart sigh and stepped into her presence for his countenance to be seen, or the show of a countenance, that it presented.

'Skepsey wanted to rush to bed without saying good night to me?' said she; leaving unnoticed, except for woefulness of tone, his hurried shuffle of remarks on 'his appearance,' and 'little accidents'; ending with an inclination of his disgraceful person to

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CHAPTER XXXIV Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

the doorway, and a petition: 'If I might, Miss Nesta?' The implied pathetic reference to a surgically-treated nose under a cross of strips of plaster, could not obtain dismissal for him. And he had one eye of sinister hue, showing beside its lighted-grey fellow as if a sullen punished dragon-whelp had couched near some quick wood-pigeon. The two eyes blinked rapidly. He was a picture of Guilt in the nude, imploring to be sent into concealment.

The cruelty of detaining him was evident.

'Yes, if you must,' Nesta said. 'But, dear Skepsey, will it be the magistrate again to-morrow?'

He feared it would be; he fancied it would needs be. He concluded by stating, that he was bound to appear before the magistrate in the morning; and he begged assistance to keep it from the knowledge of the Miss Duvidneys, who had been so kind to him.

'Has there been bailing of you again, Skepsey?'

'A good gentleman, a resident,' he replied; 'a military gentleman; indeed, a colonel of the cavalry; but, it may so be, retired; and anxious about our vast possessions; though he thinks a translation of a French attack on England unimportant. He says, the Germans despise us most.'

'Then this gentleman thinks you have a good case?'

'He is a friend of Captain Dartrey's.'

Hearing that name, Nesta said: 'Now, Skepsey, you must tell me everything. You are not to mind your looks. I believe, I do always believe you mean well.'

'Miss Nesta, it depends upon the magistrate's not being prejudiced against the street-processionists.'

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CHAPTER XXXIV
Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

'But you may expect justice from the magistrate, if your case is good?'

'I would not say no, Miss Nesta. But we find, the opinion of the public has its effect with magistrates—their sentences. They are severe on boxing. They have latterly treated the "Army" with more consideration, owing to the change in the public view. I myself have changed.'

'Have you joined it?'

'I cannot say I am a member of it.'

'You walked in the ranks to-day, and you were maltreated? Your friend was there?'

'I walked with Matilda Pridden; that is, parallel, along the pavement.'

'I hope she came out of it unhurt?'

'It is thanks to Captain Dartrey, Miss Nesta.'

This time Nesta looked her question.

Manton interposed: 'You are to speak, Mr. Skepsey'; and she stopped a flood of narrative, that was knocking in his mind to feel its head and to leap—an uninterrupted half-minute more would have shaped the story for the proper flow.

He began, after attending to the throb of his bruises in a manner to correct them rather than solace; and the beginning was the end: 'Captain Dartrey rescued us, before Matilda Pridden suffered harm, to mention —the chin, slight, teeth unshaken; a beautiful set. She is angry with Captain Dartrey, for having recourse to violence in her defence: it is against her principles. "Then you die," she says; and our principles are to gain more by death. She says, we are alive in them; but worse if we abandon them for the sake of living.—I am a little confused; she is very

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CHAPTER XXXIV Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

abstruse.—Because, *that* is the corruptible life, she says. I have found it quite impossible to argue with her; she has always a complete answer; wonderful. In case of Invasion, we are to lift our voices to the Lord; and the Lord's will shall be manifested. If we are robbed, we ask, How came we by the goods. It is unreasonable; it strikes at rights of property. But I have to go on thinking. When in danger, she sings without excitement. When the blow struck her, she stopped singing only an instant. She says, no one fears, who has real faith. She will not let me call her brave. She cannot admire Captain Dartrey. Her principles are opposed. She said to him, "Sir, you did what seemed to you right." She thinks every blow struck sends us back to the state of the beasts. Her principles . . .'

'How was it Captain Dartrey happened to be present, Skepsey?'

'She is very firm. You cannot move her.—Captain Dartrey was on his way to the station, to meet a gentleman from London, Miss Nesta. He carried a stick—a remarkable stick—he had shown to me in the morning, and he has given it me now. He says, he has done his last with it. He seems to have some of Matilda Pridden's ideas about fighting, when it's over. He was glad to be rid of the stick, he said.'

'But who attacked you? What were the people?'

'Captain Dartrey says, England may hold up her head while she breeds young women like Matilda Pridden:—right or wrong, he says: it is the substance.'

Hereupon Manton, sick of Miss Pridden, shook the

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CHAPTER XXXIV Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

little man with a snappish word, to bring him to attention. She got him together sufficiently for him to give a lame version of the story; flat until he came to his heroine's behaviour, when he brightened a moment, and he sank back absorbed in her principles and theories of life. It was understood by Nesta, that the processionists, going at a smart pace, found their way blocked and were assaulted in one of the side-streets; and that Skepsey rushed to the defence of Matilda Pridden; and that, while they were engaged, Captain Dartrey was passing at the end of the street, and recognized one he knew in the thick of it and getting the worst of it, owing to numbers. 'I will show you the stick he did it with, Miss Nesta'; said Skepsey, regardless of narrative; and darted out of the room to bring in the Demerara supple-jack; holding which, he became inspired to relate something of Captain Dartrey's deeds.

They gave no pleasure to his young lady, as he sadly perceived:—thus it is with the fair sex ever, so fond of heroes! She shut her eyes from the sight of the Demerara supple-jack descending right and left upon the skulls of a couple of bully lads. 'That will do—you were rescued. And now go to bed, Skepsey; and be up at seven to breakfast with me,' Nesta said, for his battle-damaged face would be more endurable to behold after an interval, she hoped; and she might in the morning dissociate its evil look from the deeds of Captain Dartrey.

The thought of her hero taking active part in a street-fray, was repulsive to her; it swamped his brilliancy. And this distressed her, by withdrawing

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CHAPTER XXXIV Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

the support which the thought of him had been to her since mid-day. She lay for sleepless hours, while nursing a deeper pain, under oppression of repugnance to battle-dealing, blood-shedding men. It was long before she grew mindful of the absurdity of the moan recurring whenever reflection wearied. Translated into speech, it would have run: 'In a street of the town! with a stick!'—The vulgar picture pursued her to humiliation; it robbed her or dimmed her possession of the one bright thing she had remaining to her. So she deemed it during the heavy sighs of night; partly conscious, that in some strange way it was as much as tossing her to the man who never could have condescended to the pugnacious using of a stick in a street. He, on the contrary, was a cover to the shamefaced.

Her heart was weak that night. She hovered above it, but not so detached as to scorn it for fawning to one—any one—who would offer her and her mother a cover from scorn. And now she exalted Dudley's generosity, now clung to a low idea of a haven in her father's wealth; and she was unaware, that the second mood was deduced from the first. She did know herself cowardly: she had, too, a critic in her clear head, to spurn at the creature who could think of purchasing the world's respect. Dudley's generosity sprang up to silence the voice. She could praise him, on a review of it, for delicacy, moreover; and the delicacy laid her under a more positive obligation. Her sense of it was not without a toneless quaint faint savour of the romantic, that her humour little humorously caught at, to paint her a picture of former heroes of fiction, who win their trying lady by their perfection

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CHAPTER XXXIV Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

of good conduct on a background of high birth; and who are not seen to be wooden before the volume closes. Her fatigue of sleeplessness plunged her into the period of poke-bonnets and peaky hats to admire him; giving her the kind of sweetness we may imagine ourselves to get in the state of tired horse munching hay. If she had gone to her bed with a noble or simply estimable plain image of one of her friends in her heart, to sustain it, she would not have been thus abject. Skepsey's discoloured eye, and Captain Dartrey's behaviour behind it, threw her upon Dudley's generosity, as being the shield for an outcast. Girls, who see at a time of need their ideal extinguished in its appearing tarnished, are very much at the disposal of the pressing suitor. Nesta rose in the black winter morn, summoning the best she could think of to glorify Dudley, that she might not feel so doomed.

According to an agreement overnight, she went to the bedroom of Dorothea and Virginia, to assure them of her having slept well, and say the good-bye to them and their Tasso. The little dog was the growl of a silken ball in a basket. His mistresses excused him, because of his being unused to the appearance of any person save Manton in their bedroom. Dorothea, kissing her, said: 'Adieu, dear child; and there is home with us always, remember. And, after breakfast, however it may be, you will, for our greater feeling of security, have—she has our orders—Manton—your own maid we consider too young for a guardian—to accompany you. We will not have it on our consciences, that by any possibility harm came to you while you were under our charge. The good innocent

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CHAPTER XXXIV Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

girl we received from the hands of your father, we return to him; we are sure of that.'

Nesta said: 'Mr. Sowerby promised he would come.'

'However it may be,' Dorothea repeated her curtaining phrase.

Virginia put in a word of apology for Tasso's temper: he enjoyed ordinarily a slumber of half an hour's longer duration. He was, Dorothea feelingly added, regularity itself. Virginia murmured: 'Except once!' and both were appalled by the recollection of *that night*. It had, nevertheless, caused them to reperuse the Rev. Stuart Rem's published beautiful sermon On Dirt; the words of which were an antidote to the night of Tasso in the nostrils of Mnemosyne; so that Dorothea could reply to her sister, slightly by way of a reproval, quoting Mr. Stuart Rem at his loftiest: '"Let us not bring into the sacred precincts Dirt from the roads, but have a care to spread it where it is a fructification."' Virginia produced the sequent sentence, likewise weighty. Nesta stood between the thin division of their beds, her right hand given to one, her left to the other. They had the semblance of a haven out of storms.

She reflected, after shutting the door of their room, that the residing with them had been a means of casting her—it was an effort to remember how—upon the world where the tree of knowledge grows. She had eaten; and she might be the worse for it; but she was raised to a height that would not let her look with envy upon peace and comfort. Luxurious quiet people were as ripening glass-house fruits. Her bitter gathering of the knowledge of life had sharpened her

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CHAPTER XXXIV. Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

intellect; and the intellect, even in the young, is, and not less usefully, hard metal rather than fallow soil. But for the fountain of human warmth at her breast, she might have been snared by the conceit of intellect, to despise the simple and conventional, or shed the pity which is charity's contempt. She had only to think of the kindness of the dear good ladies; her heart jumped to them at once. And when she fancied hearing those innocent souls of women embracing her and reproaching her for the knowledge of life she now bore, her words down deep in her bosom were: It has helped me to bear the shock of other knowledge! How would she have borne it before she knew of the infinitely evil? Saving for the tender compassion weeping over her mother, she had not much acute personal grief.

For this world condemning her birth, was the world tolerant of that infinitely evil! Her intellect fortified her to be combative by day, after the night of imagination; which splendid power is not so serviceable as the logical mind in painful seasons: for night revealed the world snorting Dragon's breath at a girl guilty of knowing its vilest. More than she liked to recall, it had driven her scorched, half withered, to the shelter of Dudley. The daylight, spreading thin at the windows, restored her from that weakness. 'We will quit England,' she said, thinking of her mother and herself, and then of her father's surely following them. She sighed thankfully, half way through the breakfast with Skepsey, at sight of the hour by the clock; she was hurriedly sentient of the puzzle of her feelings, when she guessed at a chance that Dudley would be delayed. She supposed herself as possibly feeling not

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CHAPTER XXXIV. Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

so well able to keep every thought of her head brooding on her mother in Dudley's company.

Skepsey's face was just sufferable by light of day, if one pitied reflecting on his honest intentions; it ceased to discolour another. He dropped a few particulars of his hero in action; but the heroine eclipsed. He was heavier than ever with his Matilda Pridden. At the hour for departure, Perrin had a conveyance at the door. Nesta sent off Skepsey with a complimentary message to Captain Dartrey. Her maid Mary begged her to finish her breakfast; Manton suggested the waiting a further two or three minutes. 'We must not be late,' Nesta said; and when the minute-hand of the clock marked ample time for the drive to the station, she took her seat and started, keeping her face resolutely set seaward, having at her ears the ring of a cry that was to come from Manton. But Manton was dumb; she spied no one on the pavement who signalled to stop them. And no one was at the station to greet them. They stepped into a carriage where they were alone. Dudley with his dreaded generosity melted out of Nesta's thoughts, like the vanishing steam-wreath on the dip between the line and the downs.

She passed into music, as she always did under motion of carriages and trains, whether in happiness or sadness: and the day being one that had a sky, the scenic of music swung her up to soar. None of her heavy burdens enchained, though she knew the weight of them, with those of other painful souls. The piping at her breast gave wings to large and small of the visible; and along the downs went stateliest of flowing dances; a copse lengthened to forest; a pool of

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CHAPTER XXXIV Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

cattle-water caught grey for flights through enchantment. Cottage-children, wherever seen in groups, she wreathed above with angels to watch them. Her mind all the while was busy upon earth, embracing her mother, eyeing her father. Imagination and our earthly met midway, and still she flew, until she was brought to the ground by a shot. She struggled to rise, uplifting Judith Marsett: a woman not so very much older than her own teens, in the count of years, and ages older; and the world pulling at her heels to keep her low. That unhappiest had no one but a sisterly girl to help her: and how she clung to the slender help! Who else was there?

The good and the bad in the woman struck separate blows upon the girl's resonant nature. She perceived the good, and took it into her reflections. The bad she divined: it approached like some threat of inflammation. Natures resonant as that which animated this girl, are quick at the wells of understanding: and she had her intimations of the world's wisdom in withholding contagious presences from the very many of the young, who may not have an aim, or ideal or strong human compassion, for a preservative. She was assured of her possessing it. She asked herself in her mother's voice, and answered mutely. She had the certainty: for she rebuked the slavish feverishness of the passion, as betrayed by Mrs. Marsett; and the woman's tone, as of strung wires ringing on a rage of the wind. Then followed her cry for the man who would speak to Captain Marsett of his duty in honour. An image of one, accompanying the faster beats of her heart, beguiled her to think away from the cause. He, the one man known to her, would

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CHAPTER XXXIV Contains Deeds Unrelated and Expositions of Feelings

act the brother's part on behalf of the hapless creature.

Nesta just imagined her having supplicated him, and at once imagination came to dust. She had to thank him: she knelt to him. For the first time of her life she found herself seized with her sex's shudder in the blood.

CHAPTER XXXV

In which again we make use of the Old Lamps for Lighting an Abysmal Darkness

And if Nesta had looked out of her carriage-window soon after the train began to glide, her eagle of imagination would have reeled from the heights, with very different feelings, earlier, perhaps a captive, at sight of the tardy gentleman rushing along the platform, and bending ear to the footman Perrin, and staring for one lost.

The snaky tail of the train imparted to Dudley an apprehension of the ominous in his having missed her. It wound away, and left regrets, which raised a chorus of harsh congratulations from the opposite party of his internal parliament.

Neither party could express an opinion without rousing the other to an uproar.

He had met his cousin Southweare overnight. He had heard, that there was talk of Miss Radnor. Her name was in the mouth of Major Worrell. It was coupled with the name of Mrs. Marsett. A military

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captain, in the succession to be Sir Edward Marsett, bestowed on her the shadow of his name.

CHAPTER XXXV
In which again we make use of the Old Lamps for Lighting an Abysmal Darkness

It could be certified, that Miss Radnor visited the woman at her house. What are we to think of Miss Radnor, save that daughters of depraved parents . . .! A torture undeserved is the Centaur's shirt for driving us to lay about in all directions. He who had swallowed so much—a thunderbolt: a still undigested discharge from the perplexing heavens—jumped frantic under the pressure upon him of more, and worse. A girl getting herself talked of at a Club! And she of all young ladies should have been the last to draw round her that buzz of tongues. On such a subject!—The parents pursuing their career of cynical ostentation in London, threw an evil eye of heredity on their offspring in the egg; making anything credible, pointing at tendencies.

An alliance with her was impossible. So said disgust. Anger came like a stronger beast, and extinguished the safety there was in the thing it consumed, by growing so excessive as to require tempering with drops of compassion; which prepared the way for a formal act of cold forgiveness; and the moment that was conceived, he had a passion to commit the horrible magnanimity, and did it on a grand scale, and dissolved his heart in the grandeur, and enslaved himself again.

Far from expungeing the doubt of her, forgiveness gave it a stamp and an edge. His renewed enslavement set him perusing his tyrant keenly, as nauseated captives do; and he saw, that forgiveness was beside the case. For this Nesta Victoria Radnor would not crave it or accept it. He had mentally played the

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CHAPTER XXXV
In which again we make use of the Old Lamps for Lighting an Abysmal Darkness

woman to her superior vivaciousness too long for him to see her taking a culprit's attitude. What she did, she intended to do. The mother would not have encouraged her. Her father idolized her; and the father was a frank hedonist, whose blood . . . speculation on horseback gallops to barren extremes. Eyes like hers—if there had not been the miserable dupes of girls! Conduct is the sole guide to female character. That likewise may be the hypocrite's mask.

Popular artists, intent to gratify the national taste for effects called realistic, have figured in scenes of battle the raying fragments of a man from impact of a cannon-ball on his person. Truly thus it may be when flesh contends. But an image of the stricken and scattered mind of the man should, though deficient in the attraction, have a greater significance, forasmuch as it does not exhibit him entirely liquefied and showered into space; it leaves him his legs for the taking of further steps. Dudley, standing on the platform of Nesta's train, one half minute too late, according to his desire before he put himself in motion, was as widely torn as the vapour shredded streaming to fingers and threads off the upright columnar shot of the shriek from the boiler. He wished every mad antagonism to his wishes: that he might see her, be blind to her; embrace, discard; heal his wound, and tear it wider. He thanked her for the grossness of an offence precluding excuses. He was aware of a glimmer of advocacy in the very grossness. He conjured-up her features, and they said, her innocence was the sinner; they scoffed at him for the dupe he was willing to be. She had enigma's mouth, with the eyes of morning.

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CHAPTER XXXV
In which again we make use of the Old Lamps for Lighting an Abysmal Darkness

More than most girls, she was the girl-Sphinx to him: because of her having ideas — or what he deemed ideas. She struck a toneing warmth through his intelligence, not dissimilar to the livelier circulation of the blood in the frame breathing mountain air. She really helped him, incited him to go along with this windy wild modern time more cheerfully, if not quite hopefully. For she had been the book of Romance he despised when it appeared as a printed volume: and which might have educated the young man to read some among our riddles in the book of humanity. The white he was ready to take for silver: the black were all black; the spotted had received corruption's label. Her youthful French governess Mademoiselle de Seilles was also peculiarly enigmatic at the mouth: conversant, one might expect, with the disintegrating literature of her country. In public, the two talked of St. Louis. One of them in secret visits a Mrs. Marsett. The Southweare women, the Hennen women, and Lady Evelina Reddish, were artless candid creatures in their early days, not transgressing in a glance. Lady Grace Halley had her fit of the devotional previous to marriage. No girl known to Dudley by report or acquaintance had committed so scandalous an indiscretion as Miss Radnor's: it pertained to the insolently vile.

And on that ground, it started the voluble defence. For certain suspected things will dash suspicion to the rebound, when they are very dark. As soon as the charge against her was moderated, the defence expired. He heard the world delivering its judgement upon her; and he sorrowfully acquiesced. She passed from him.

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CHAPTER XXXV
In which again we make use of the Old Lamps for Lighting an Abysmal Darkness

When she was cut off, she sang him in the distance a remembered saying of hers, with the full melody of her voice. One day, treating of modern Pessimism, he had draped a cadaverous view of our mortal being in a quotation of the wisdom of the Philosopher Emperor: 'To set one's love upon the swallow is a futility.' And she, weighing it, nodded, and replied: 'May not the pleasure for us remain if we set our love upon the beauty of the swallow's flight?'

There was, for a girl, a bit of idea, real idea, in that: meaning, of course, the picture we are to have of the bird's wings in motion;—it has often been admired. Oh! not much of an idea in itself:—feminine and vague. But it was pertinent, opportune; in this way she stimulated.

And the girl who could think it, and call on a Mrs. Marsett, was of the class of mixtures properly to be handed over to chemical experts for analysis!

She had her aspirations on behalf of her sex: she and Mademoiselle de Seilles discussed them: women were to do this, do that:—necessarily a means of instructing a girl to learn what they did do. If the lower part of her face had been as reassuring to him as the upper, he might have put a reluctant faith in the puremindedness of these aspirations, without reverting to her origin, and also to recent rumours of her father and Lady Grace Halley. As it was, he inquired of the cognizant, whether an intellectual precocity, devoted by preference to questions affecting the state of women, did not rather more than suggest the existence of urgent senses likewise. She, a girl under twenty, had an interest in public matters, and

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CHAPTER XXXV
In which again we make use of the Old Lamps for Lighting an Abysmal Darkness

she called on a Mrs. Marsett. To plead her simplicity, was to be absolutely ignorant of her.

He neighboured sagacity when he pointed that interrogation relating to Nesta's precociousness of the intelligence. For, as they say in dactylomancy, the 'psychical' of women are not disposed in their sensitive early days to dwell upon the fortunes of their sex: a thought or two turns them facing away, with the repugnant shiver. They worship at a niche in the wall. They cannot avoid imputing some share of foulness to them that are for scouring the chamber; and the civilized male, keeping his own chamber locked, quite shares their pale taper's view. The full-blooded to the finger-tips, on the other hand, are likely to be drawn to the subject, by noble inducement as often as by base: Nature at flood being the cause in either instance. This young Nature of the good and the bad, is the blood which runs to power of heart as well as to thirsts of the flesh. Then have men to sound themselves, to discover how much of Nature their abstract honourable conception or representative eidolon of young women will bear without going to pieces; and it will not be much, unless they shall have taken instruction from the poet's pen:—for a view possibly of Nature at work to cast the slough, when they see her writhing as in her ugliest old throes. If they have learnt of Nature's priest to respect her, they will less distrust those rare daughters of hers who are moved by her warmth to lift her out of slime. It is by her own live warmth that it has to be done: cold worship at a niche in the wall will not do it.—Well, there is an index, for the enlargement of your charity.

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CHAPTER XXXV
In which again we make use of the Old Lamps for Lighting an Abysmal Darkness

But facts were Dudley's teachers. Physically, morally, mentally, he read the world through facts; — that is to say, through the facts he encountered: and he was in consequence foredoomed to a succession of bumps; all the heavier from his being, unlike the horned kind, not unimpressible by the hazy things outside his experience. Even at his darkest over Nesta, it was his indigestion of the misconduct of her parents, which denied to a certain still small advocate within him the right to raise a voice: that good fellow struck the attitude for pleading, and had to be silent; for he was Instinct; at best a stammering speaker in the Court of the wigged Facts. Instinct of this Nesta Radnor's character would have said a brave word, but for her deeds bearing witness to her inheritance of a lawlessly adventurous temperament.

What to do? He was no nearer to an answer when the wintry dusk had fallen on the promenading crowds. To do nothing, is the wisdom of those who have seen fools perish. Facts had not taught him, that the doing nothing, for a length of days after the first shock he sustained, was the reason of how it came that Nesta knitted closer her acquaintance with the 'agreeable lady' she mentioned in her letter to Cronidge. Those excellent counsellors of a mercantile community gave him no warnings, that the 'masterly inactive' part, so greatly esteemed by him for the conduct of public affairs, might be perilous in dealings with a vivid girl: nor a hint, that when facts continue undigested, it is because the sensations are as violent as hysterical females to block them from the understanding. His Robin Goodfellow instinct tried to be serviceable at a crux of his meditations, where Edith Averst's con-

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CHAPTER XXXV
In which again we make use of the Old Lamps for Lighting an Abysmal Darkness

sumptive brothers waved faded hands at her chances of inheriting largely. Superb for the chances: but what of her offspring? And the other was a girl such as the lusty Dame Dowager of fighting ancestors would have signalled to the heir of the House's honours for the perpetuation of his race. No doubt: and the venerable Dame (beautiful in her old-lace frame, or say foliage, of the Ages backward, temp: Ed: III.) inflated him with a thought of her: and his readings in modern books on heredity, pure blood, physical regeneration, pronounced approval of Nesta Radnor: and thereupon instinct opened mouth to speak; and a lockjaw seized it under that scowl of his presiding mistrust of Nature.

He clung to his mistrust the more because of a warning he had from the silenced natural voice: somewhat as we may behold how the Conservatism of a Class, in a world of all the evidences showing that there is no stay to things, comes of the intuitive discernment of its finality. His mistrust was his own; and Nesta was not; not yet; though a step would make her his own. Instinct prompting to the step, was a worthless adviser. It spurred him, nevertheless.

He called at the Club for his cousin Southweare, with whom he was not in sympathy; and had information that, Southweare said, 'made the girl out all right.' Girls in these days do things which the sainted stay-at-homes preceding them would not have dreamed of doing. Something had occurred, relating to Major Worrell: he withdrew Miss Radnor's name, acknowledged himself mistaken or amended his report of her, in some way, not quite intelligible. Dudley

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CHAPTER XXXV
In which again we make use of the Old Lamps for Lighting an Abysmal Darkness

was accosted by Simeon Fenellan; subsequently by Dartrey. There was gossip over the latter gentleman's having been up before the magistrate, talk of a queer kind of stick, and Dartrey said, laughing, to Simeon: 'Rather lucky I bled the rascal';—whatever the meaning. She nursed one of her adorations for this man, who had yesterday, apparently, joined in a street-fray; so she partook of the stain of the turbid defacing all these disorderly people.

At his hotel, at breakfast the next morning, a newspaper furnished an account of Captain Dartrey Fenellan's participation in the strife, after mention of him as nephew of the Earl of Clanconan, 'now a visitor to our town'; and his deeds were accordant with his birth. Such writing was enough to send Dudley an eager listener to Colney Durance. What a people!

Mr. Dartrey Fenellan's card compelled Dudley presently to receive him.

Dartrey, not debarred by considerations, that an allusion to Miss Radnor could be conveyed only in the most delicately obscure manner, spared him no more than the plain English of his relations with her. Requested to come to the Club, at a certain hour of the afternoon, that he might hear Major Worrell's personal contradiction of scandal involving the young lady's name, together with his apology, etc., Dudley declined: and he was obliged to do it curtly; words were wanting. They are hard to find for wounded sentiments rendered complex by an infusion of policy. His present mood, with the something new to digest, held the going to Major Worrell a wrong step; he behaved as if the speaking to Dartrey Fenellan

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pledged him hardly less. And besides he had a physical abhorrence, under dictate of moral reprobation, of the broad-shouldered sinewy man, whose look of wiry alertness pictured the previous day's gory gutters.

CHAPTER XXXV
In which again we make use of the Old Lamps for Lighting an Abysmal Darkness

Dartrey set sharp eyes on him for an instant, bowed, and went.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Nesta and her Father

The day of Nesta's return was one of a number of late when Victor was robbed of his walk Westward by Lady Grace Halley, who seduced his politeness with her various forms of blandishment to take a seat in her carriage; and she was a practical speaker upon her quarter of the world when she had him there. Perhaps she was right in saying—though she had no right to say—that he and she together might have the world under their feet. It was one of those irritating suggestions which expedite us up to a bald ceiling, only to make us feel the gas-bladder's tight extension upon emptiness. It moved him to examine the poor value of his aim, by tying him to the contemptible means. One estimate involved the other, whichever came first. Somewhere he had an idea, that would lift and cleanse all degradations. But it did seem as if he were not enjoying: things pleasant enough in the passage of them were barren, if not prickly, in the retrospect.

He sprang out at the head of the park, for a tramp

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CHAPTER XXXVI
Nesta and her Father

round it, in the gloom of the girdle of lights, to recover his deadened relish of the thin phantasmal strife to win an intangible prize. His dulled physical system asked, as with the sensations of a man at the start from sleep in the hurrying grip of steam, what on earth he wanted to get, and what was the substance of his gains: what! if other than a precipitous intimacy, a deep crumbling over deeper, with a little woman amusing him in remarks of a whimsical nudity; hardly more. Nay, not more! he said; and at the end of twenty paces, he saw much more; the campaign gathered a circling suggestive brilliancy, like the lamps about the winter park; the Society, lured with glitter, hooked by greed, composed a ravishing picture; the little woman was esteemed as a serviceable lieutenant; and her hand was a small soft one, agreeable to fondle—and avaunt! But so it is in war: we must pay for our allies. What if it had been, that he and she together, with their united powers . . .? He dashed the silly vision aside, as vainer than one of the bubble-empires blown by boys; and it broke, showing no heart in it. His heart was Nataly's.

Let Colney hint his worst; Nataly bore the strain, always did bear any strain coming in the round of her duties: and if she would but walk, or if she danced at parties, she would scatter the fits of despondency besetting the phlegmatic, like this day's breeze the morning fog; or as he did with two minutes of the stretch of legs.

Full of the grandeur of that black pit of the benighted London, with its ocean-voice of the heart at beat along the lighted outer ring, Victor entered at

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his old door of the two houses he had knocked into one:—a surprise for Fredi!—and heard that his girl had arrived in the morning.

'And could no more endure her absence from her Mammy O!' The songful satirical line spouted in him, to be flung at his girl, as he ran upstairs to the boudoir off the drawing-room.

He peeped in. It was dark. Sensible of presences, he gradually discerned a thick blot along the couch to the right of the door, and he drew near. Two were lying folded together; mother and daughter. He bent over them. His hand was taken and pressed by Fredi's; she spoke; she said tenderly: 'Father.' Neither of the two made a movement. He heard the shivering rise of a sob, that fell. The dry sob going to the waste breath was Nataly's. His girl did not speak again.

He left them. He had no thought until he stood in his dressing-room, when he said 'Good!' For those two must have been lying folded together during the greater part of the day: and it meant, that the mother's heart had opened; the girl knew. Her tone: 'Father,' sweet, was heavy, too, with the darkness it came out of.

So she knew. Good. He clasped them both in his heart; tempering his pity of those dear ones with the thought, that they were of the sex which finds enjoyment in a day of the mutual tear; and envying them; he strained at a richness appearing in the sobs of their close union.

All of his girl's loving soul flew to her mother; and naturally!

She would not be harsh on her father. She would

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CHAPTER XXXVI
Nesta and her Father

say:—he loved! And true: he did love, he does love; loves no woman but the dear mother.

He flicked a short wring of the hand having taken pressure from an alien woman's before Fredi pressed it, and absolved himself in the act; thinking, How little does a woman know how true we can be to her when we smell at a flower here and there!—There they are, stationary; women the flowers, we the bee; and we are faithful in our seeming volatility; faithful to the hive!—And if women are to be stationary, the reasoning is not so bad. Funny, however, if they here and there imitatively spread a wing, and treat men in that way? It is a breach of the convention; we pay them our homage, that they may serve as flowers, not to be volatile tempters. Nataly never had been one of the sort: Lady Grace was. No necessity existed for compelling the world to bow to Lady Grace, while on behalf of his Nataly he had to . . . Victor closed the curtain over a gulf revealed by an invocation of Nature, and showing the tremendous force he partook of so largely, in her motive elements of the devourer. Horrid to behold, when we need a gracious presentation of the circumstances. She is a splendid power for as long as we confine her between the banks: but she has a passion to discover cracks; and if we give her headway, she will find one, and drive at it, and be through, uproarious in her primitive licentiousness, unless we labour body and soul like Dutchmen at the dam. Here she was, and not desired, almost detested! Nature detested! It had come about through the battle for Nataly; chiefly through Mrs. Burman's tenacious hold of the filmy thread she took for life and was enabled to use as

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a means for the perversion besides bar to the happiness of creatures really living. We may well marvel at the Fates, and tell them they are not moral agents!

Victor's reflections came across Colney Durance, who tripped and stopped them.

Dressed with his customary celerity, he waited for Nesta, to show her the lighted grand double drawing-room: a further proof of how Fortune favoured him:—she was to be told, how he one day expressed a wish for greater space, and was informed on the next, that the neighbour house was being vacated, and the day following he was in treaty for the purchase of it; returning from Tyrol, he found his place habitable.

Nesta came. Her short look at him was fond, her voice not faltering; she laid her hand under his arm and walked round the spacious room, praising the general design, admiring the porcelain, the ferns, friezes, hangings, and the grand piano, the ebony inlaid music-stands, the fire-grates and plaques, the ottomans, the tone of neutral colour that, as in sound, muted splendour. He told her it was a reception night, with music: and added: 'I miss my . . . seen anybody lately?'

'Mr. Sowerby?' said she. 'He was to have escorted me back. He may have overslept himself.'

She spoke it plainly; when speaking of the dear good ladies, she set a gentle humour at play, and comforted him, as she intended, with a souvenir of her lively spirit, wanting only in the manner of gaiety.

He allowed, that she could not be quite gay.

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CHAPTER XXXVI
Nesta and her Father

More deeply touched the next minute, he felt in her voice, in her look, in her phrasing of speech, an older, much older daughter than the Fredi whom he had conducted to Moorsedge. 'Kiss me,' he said.

She turned to him full-front, and kissed his right cheek, and left, and his forehead, saying: 'My love! my papa! my own dear dada!' all the words of her girlhood in her new sedateness; and smiling: like the moral crepuscular of a sunlighted day down a not totally inanimate Sunday London street.

He strained her to his breast. 'Mama soon be here?'

'Soon.'

That was well. And possibly at the present moment applying, with her cunning hand, the cosmetics and powders he could excuse for a concealment of the traces of grief.

Satisfied in being a superficial observer, he did not spy to see more than the world would when Nataly entered the dining-room at the quiet family dinner. She performed her part for his comfort, though not prattling; and he missed his Fredi's delicious warble of the prattle running rill-like over our daily humdrum. Simeon Fenellan would have helped. Then suddenly came enlivenment: a recollection of news in the morning's paper. 'No harm before Fredi, my dear. She's a young woman now. And no harm, so to speak—at least, not against the Sanfredini. She has donned her name again, and a villa on Como, leaving her *duque*;—paragraph from a Milanese musical Journal; no particulars. Now, mark me, we shall have her at Lakelands in the Summer. If only we could have her now!'

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CHAPTER XXXVI
Nesta and her Father

'It would be a pleasure,' said Nataly. Her heart had a blow in the thought, that a lady of this kind would create the pleasure by not bringing criticism.

'The godmother?' he glistened upon Nesta.

She gave him low half-notes of the little blue butterfly's imitation of the superb contralto; and her hand and head at turn to hint the theatrical operatic attitude.

'Delicious!' he cried, his eyelids were bedewed at the vision of the three of them planted in the past; and here again, out of the dark wood, where something had required to be said, and had been said; and all was happily over, owing to the goodness and sweetness of the two dear innocents;—whom heaven bless! Jealousy of their naturally closer heart-at-heart, had not a whisper for him; part of their goodness and sweetness was felt to be in the not excluding him.

Nesta engaged to sing one of the old duets with her mother. She saw her mother's breast lift in a mechanical effort to try imaginary notes, as if doubtful of her capacity, more at home in the dumb deep sigh they fell to. Her mother's heroism made her a sacred woman to the thoughts of the girl, overcoming wonderment at the extreme submissiveness.

She put a screw on her mind to perceive the rational object there might be for causing her mother to go through tortures in receiving and visiting; and she was arrested by the louder question, whether she could think such a man as her father irrational.

People with resounding names, waves of a steady

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CHAPTER XXXVI
Nesta and her Father

stream, were announced by Arlington, just as in the days, that seemed remote, before she went to Moorsedge; only they were more numerous, and some of the titles had ascended a stage. There were great lords, there were many great ladies; and Lady Grace Halley shuffling amid them, like a silken shimmer in voluminous robes. They crowded about their host where he stood. 'He is their *Law*!' Colney said, speaking unintelligibly, in the absence of the Simeon Fenellan regretted so loudly by Mr. Beaves Urmsing. They had an air of worshipping, and he of swimming.

There were also City magnates, and Lakelands neighbours: the gentleman representing Pride of Port, Sir Abraham Quatley; and Colonel Corfe; Sir Rodwell and Lady Blachington; Mrs. Fanning; Mr. Caddis. Few young men and maids were seen. Dr. John Cormyn came without his wife, not mentioning her. Mrs. Peter Yatt touched the notes for voices at the piano. Priscilla Graves was a vacancy, and likewise the Rev. Septimus Barmby. Peridon and Catkin, and Mr. Pempton took their usual places. There was no fluting. A famous Canadian lady was the principal singer. A Galician violinist, zig-zagging extreme extensions and contractions of his corporeal frame in execution, and described by Colney as 'Paganini on a wall,' failed to supplant Durandarte in Nesta's memory. She was asked by Lady Grace for the latest of Dudley. Sir Abraham Quatley named him with handsome emphasis. Great dames caressed her; openly approved; shadowed the future place among them.

Victor alluded at night to Mrs. John Cormyn's absence. He said: 'A homœopathic doctor's wife!'

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CHAPTER XXXVI
Nesta and her Father

nothing more; and by that little, he prepared Nesta for her mother's explanation. The great London people, ignorant or not, were caught by the strong tide he created, and carried on it. But there was a bruiting of the secret among their set; and the one to fall away from her, Nataly marvellingly named Mrs. John Cormyn; whose marriage was of her making. She did not disapprove Priscilla's behaviour. Priscilla had come to her and, protesting affection, had openly stated, that she required time and retirement to recover her proper feelings. Nataly smiled a melancholy criticism of an inconsequent or capricious woman, in relating to Nesta certain observations Priscilla had dropped upon poor faithful Mr. Pempton, because of his concealment from her of his knowledge of things: for this faithful gentleman had been one of the few not ignorant. The rumour was traceable to the City.

'Mother, we walk on planks,' Nesta said.

Nataly answered: 'You will grow used to it.'

Her mother's habitual serenity in martyrdom was deceiving. Nesta had a transient suspicion, that she had grown, from use, to like the whirl of company, for oblivion in the excitement; and as her remembrance of her own station among the crowding people was a hot flush, the difference of their feelings chilled her.

Nataly said: 'It is to-morrow night again; we do not rest.' She smiled; and at once the girl read woman's armour on the dear face, and asked herself, Could I be so brave? The question following was a speechless wave, that surged at her father. She tried to fathom the scheme he entertained. The attempt

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CHAPTER XXXVI
Nesta and her Father

obscured her conception of the man he was. She could not grasp him, being too young for knowing, that young heads cannot obtain a critical hold upon one whom they see grandly succeeding: it is the sun's brilliance to their eyes.

Mother and daughter slept together that night, and their embrace was their world.

Nesta delighted her father the next day by walking beside him into the City, as far as the end of the Embankment, where the carriage was in waiting with her maid to bring her back; and at his mere ejaculation of a wish, the hardy girl drove down in the afternoon for the walk home with him. Lady Grace Halley was at the office. 'I am an incorrigible Stock Exchange gambler,' she said.

'Only,' Victor bade her beware, 'Mines are undulating in movement, and their heights are a preparation for their going down.'

She said she 'liked a swing.'

Nesta looked at them in turn.

The day after and the day after, Lady Grace was present. She made play with Dudley's name.

This coming into the City daily of a girl, for the sake of walking back in winter weather with her father, struck her as ambiguous: either a jealous foolish mother's device, or that of a weak man beating about for protection. But the woman of the positive world soon read to the contrary; helped a little by the man, no doubt. She read rather too much to the contrary, and took the pedestrian girl for perfect simplicity in her tastes, when Nesta had so far grown watchful as to feel relieved by the lady's departure. Her mother, without sympathy for the lady, was too

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great of soul for jealousy. Victor had his Nataly before him at a hint from Lady Grace: and he went somewhat further than the exact degree when affirming, that Nataly could not scheme, and was incapable of suspecting.—Nataly could perceive things with a certain accuracy: she would not stoop to a meanness. —'Plot? Nataly?' said he, and shrugged. In fact, the void of plot, drama, shuffle of excitement, reflected upon Nataly. He might have seen as tragic as ever dripped on Stage, had he looked.

But the walk Westward with his girl, together with pride in a daughter who clove her way through all weathers, won his heart to exultation. He told her: 'Fredi does her dada so much good'; not telling her in what, or opening any passage to the mystery of the man he was. She was trying to be a student of life, with her eyes down upon hard earth, despite of her winged young head; she would have compassed him better had he dilated in sublime fashion; but he baffled her perusal of a man of power by the simpleness of his enjoyment of small things coming in his way;—the lighted shops, the crowd, emergence from the crowd, or the meeting near midwinter of a soft warm wind along the Embankment, and dark Thames magnificently coroneted over his grimy flow. There is no grasping of one who quickens us.

His flattery of his girl, too, restored her broken feeling of personal value; it permeated her nourishingly from the natural breath of him that it was.

At times he touched deep in humaneness; and he set her heart leaping on the flash of a thought to lay it bare, with the secret it held, for his help. That was a dream. She could more easily have uttered the

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CHAPTER XXXVI
Nesta and her Father

words to Captain Dartrey, after her remembered abashing holy tremour of the vision of doing it and casting herself on noblest man's compassionateness; and her imagined thousand emotions;—a rolling music within her, a wreath of cloud-glory in her sky;—which had, as with virgins it may be, plighted her body to him for sheer urgency of soul; drawn her by a single unwitting-to-brain, conscious-in-blood, shy curl outward of the sheathing leaf to the flowering of woman to him; even to the shore of that strange sea, where the maid stands choosing this one man for her destiny, as in a trance. So are these young ones unfolded, shade by shade; and a shade is all the difference with them; they can teach the poet to marvel at the immensity of vitality in 'the shadow of a shade.'

Her father shut the glimpse of a possible speaking to him of Mrs. Marsett, with a renewal of his eulogistic allusions to Dudley Sowerby: the 'perfect gentleman, good citizen'; prospective heir to an earldom besides. She bowed to Dudley's merits; she read off the honorific pedimental letters of a handsome statue, for a sign to herself that she passed it.

She was unjust, as Victor could feel, though he did not know how coldly unjust. For among the exorbitant requisitions upon their fellow-creatures made by the young, is the demand, that they be definite: no mercy is in them for the transitional. And Dudley—and it was under her influence, and painfully, not ignobly—was in process of development: interesting to philosophers, if not to maidens.

Victor accused her of paying too much heed to Colney Durance's epigrams upon their friends. He

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quite joined with his English world in its opinion, that epigrams are poor squibs when they do not come out of great guns. Epigrams fired at a venerable nation, are surely the poorest of popgun paper pellets. The English kick at the insolence, when they are not in the mood for pelleting themselves, or when the armed Foreigner is overshadowing and braceing. Colney's pretentious and laboured Satiric Prose Epic of 'THE RIVAL TONGUES,' particularly offended him, as being a clever aim at no hitting; and sustained him, inasmuch as it was an acid friend's collapse. How could Colney expect his English to tolerate such a spiteful diatribe! The suicide of Dr. Bouthoin at San Francisco was the finishing stroke to the chances of success of the Serial;—although we are promised splendid evolutions on the part of Mr. Semhians; who, after brilliant achievements with bat and ball, abandons those weapons of old England's modern renown, for a determined wrestle with our English pronunciation of words, and rescue of the spelling of them from the printer. His headache over the present treatment of the verb 'To bid,' was a quaint beginning for one who had soon to plead before Japanese, and who acknowledged now 'in contrition of spirit,' that in formerly opposing the scheme for an Academy, he helped to the handing of our noble language to the rapid reporter of news for an apathetic public. Further, he discovered in astonishment the sub-ordination of all literary Americans to the decrees of their literary authorities; marking a Transatlantic point of departure, and contrasting ominously with the unruly Islanders—'grunting the higgledy-piggledy of their various ways, in all the porker's gutgamut at

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CHAPTER XXXVI
Nesta and her Father

admit he was wrong about your being received at Moorsedge: a bit of a triumph!'

Nesta's walks with her father were no loss of her to Nataly; the girl came back to her bearing so fresh and so full a heart; and her father was ever prouder of her: he presented new features of her in his quotations of her sayings, thoughtful sayings. 'I declare she helps one to think,' he said. 'It's not precocity; it's healthy inquiry. She brings me nearer ideas of my own, not yet examined, than any one else does. I say, what a wife for a man!'

'She takes my place beside you, dear, now I am not quite strong,' said Nataly. 'You have not seen . . .?'

'Dudley Sowerby? He's at Cronidge, I believe. His elder brother's in a bad way. Bad business, this looking to a death.'

Nataly's eyes revealed a similar gulf.

Let it be cast on Society, then! A Society opposing Nature forces us to these murderous looks upon impediments. But what of a Society in the dance with Nature? Victor did not approve of that. He began, under the influence of Nesta's companionship, to see the Goddess Nature there is in a chastened nature. And this view shook the curtain covering his lost Idea. He felt sure he should grasp it soon and enter into its daylight: a muffled voice within him said, that he was kept waiting to do so by the inexplicable tardiness of a certain one to rise ascending to her spiritual roost. She was now harmless to strike: Themison, Carling, Jarniman, even the Rev. Groseman Buttermore, had been won to the cause of humanity. Her ascent, considering her inability to do further harm below, was most mysteriously delayed. Owing

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CHAPTER XXXVI
Nesta and her Father

to it, in a manner almost as mysterious, he was kept crossing a bridge having a slippery bit on it. Thanks to his gallant Fredi, he had found his feet again. But there was a bruise where, to his honour, he felt tenderest. And Fredi away, he might be down again —for no love of a slippery bit, proved slippery, one might guess, by a predecessor or two. Ta-ta-ta-ta and mum! Still, in justice to the little woman, she had been serviceable. She would be still more so, if a member of Parliament now on his back—here we are with the murder-eye again!

Nesta's never speaking of Lakelands clouded him a little, as an intimation of her bent of mind.

'And does my girl come to her dada to-day?' he said, on the fifth morning since her return; prepared with a villanous resignation to hear, that this day she abstained, though he had the wish for her coming.

'Why, don't you know,' said she, 'we all meet to have tea in Mr. Durance's chambers; and I walk back with you, and there we are joined by mama; and we are to have a feast of literary celebrities.'

'Colney's selection of them! And Simeon Fenellan, I hope. Perhaps Dartrey. Perhaps . . . eh?'

She reddened. So Dudley Sowerby's unspoken name could bring the blush to her cheeks. Dudley had his excuses in his brother's condition. His father's health, too, was—but this was Dudley calculating. Where there are coronets, calculations of this sort must needs occur; just as where there are complications. Odd, one fancies it, that we walking along the pavement of civilized life, should be perpetually summoning Orcus to our aid, for the sake of getting a clear course.

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CHAPTER XXXVI
Nesta and her Father

'And supposing a fog, my dearie?' he said.

'The daughter in search of her father carries a lamp to light her to him through densest fogs as well as over deserts,' etc. She declaimed a long sentence, to set the ripple running in his features; and when he left the room for a last word with Armandine, she flung arms round her mother's neck, murmuring: 'Mother! mother!' a cry equal to 'I am sure I do right,' and understood so by Nataly approving it; she too on the line of her instinct, without an object in sight.

CHAPTER XXXVII

The Mother: the Daughter

Taking Nesta's hand, on her entry into his chambers with her father, Colney Durance bowed over it and kissed it. The unusual performance had a meaning; she felt she was praised. It might be because she made herself her father's companion. 'I can't persuade him to put on a great-coat,' she said. 'You would defeat his aim at the particular waistcoat of his ambition,' said Colney, goaded to speak, not anxious to be heard.

He kept her beside him, leading her about for introductions to multiform celebrities of both sexes: among them the gentleman editing the Magazine which gave out serially THE RIVAL TONGUES: and there was talk of a dragon-throated public's queer appetite in Letters. The pained Editor deferentially smiled at her cheerful mention of Delphica. 'In book form, perhaps!' he remarked, with plaintive resignation;

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adding: 'You read it?' And a lady exclaimed: 'We all read it!'

But we are the elect, who see signification and catch flavour; and we are reminded of an insatiable monster how sometimes capricious is his gorge. 'He may happen to be in the humour for a shaking!' Colney's poor consolation it was to say of the prospects of his published book: for the funny monster has been known to like a shaking.

'He takes it kinder tickled,' said Fenellan, joining the group and grasping Nesta's hand with a warmth that thrilled her and set her guessing. 'A taste of his favourite Cayenne lollypop, Colney; it fetches the tear he loves to shed, or it gives him digestive heat in the bag of his literary receptacle—fearfully relaxed and enormous! And no wonder; his notion of the attitude for reading, is to lie him down on his back; and he has in a jiffy the funnel of the Libraries inserted into his mouth, and he feels the publishers pouring their gallons through it unlimitedly; never crying out, which he can't; only swelling, which he's obliged to do, with a non-nutritious inflation; and that's his intellectual enjoyment: bearing a likeness to the horrible old torture of the *baillir d'eau*; and he's doomed to perish in the worst book-form of dropsy. You, my dear Colney, have offended his police or excise, who stand by the funnel, in touch with his palate, to make sure that nothing above proof is poured in; and there's your misfortune. He's not half a bad fellow, you find when you haven't got to serve him.'

'Superior to his official parasites, one supposes!' Colney murmured.

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CHAPTER XXXVII The Mother: the Daughter

The celebrities were unaffectedly interested in a literary failure having certain merits; they discussed it, to compliment the crownless author; and the fervider they, the more was he endowed to read the meanness prompting the generosity. Publication of a book, is the philosopher's lantern upon one's fellows.

Colney was caught away from his private manufactory of acids by hearing Simeon Fenellan relate to Victor some of the recent occurrences at Brighton. Simeon's tone was unsatisfying; Colney would have the word; he was like steel on the grindstone for such a theme of our national grotesque-sublime.

'That Demerara Supple-jack, Victor! Don't listen to Simeon; he's a man of lean narrative, fit to chronicle political party wrangles and such like crop of carcase prose: this is epical. In DRINK we have Old England's organic Epic; Greeks and Trojans; Parliamentary Olympus, ennobled brewers, nasal fanatics, all the machinery to hand. Keep a straight eye on the primary motives of man, you'll own the English produce the material for proud verse; they're alive there! Dartrey's Demerara makes a pretty episode of the battle. I haven't seen it—if it's possible to look on it: but I hear it is flexible, of a vulgar appearance in repose, Jove's lightning at one time, the thong of Æacus at another. Observe Dartrey marching off to the Station, for the purpose of laying his miraculous weapon across the shoulders of a son of Mars, who had offended. But we have his name, my dear Victor! His name, Simeon?—Worrell; a Major Worrell: his offence being probably, that he obtained military instruction in the Service, and left it

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at his convenience, for our poor patch and tatter British Army to take in his place another young student, who 'll grow up to do similarly. And Dartrey, we assume, is off to stop that system. You behold Sir Dartrey twirling the weapon in preparatory fashion; because he is determined we shall have an army of trained officers instead of infant amateurs heading heroic louts. Not a thought of Beer in Dartrey!—always unpatriotic, you 'll say. Plato entreats his absent mistress to fix eyes on a star: eyes on Beer for the uniting of you English! I tell you no poetic fiction. Seeing him on his way, thus terribly armed, and knowing his intent, Venus, to shield a former favourite servant of Mars, conjured the most diverting of interventions, in the shape of a young woman in a poke-bonnet, and Skepsey, her squire, marching with a dozen or so, informing bedevilled mankind of the hideousness of our hymnification when it is not under secluding sanction of the Edifice, and challengeing criticism; and that was hard by, and real English, in the form of bludgeons, wielded by a battalion of the national idol Bungay Beervat's boys; and they fell upon the hymners. Here you fill in with pastoral similes. They struck the maid adored by Skepsey. And that was the blow which slew them! Our little man drove into the press with a pair of fists able to do their work. A valiant skiff upon a sea of enemies, he was having it on the nob, and suddenly the Demerara lightened. It flailed to thresh. Enough to say, brains would have come. The Bungays made a show of fight. No lack of blood in them, to stock a raw shilling's worth or gush before Achilles raging. You perceive the picture, you can almost sing the

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CHAPTER XXXVII The Mother: the Daughter

ballad. We want only a few names of the fallen. It was the carving of a *maître chef*, according to Skepsey: right—left—and point, with supreme precision: they fell, accurately sliced from the joint. Having done with them, Dartrey tossed the Demerara to Skepsey, and washed his hands of battle; and he let his major go unscathed. Phlebotomy sufficient for the day!'

Nesta's ears hummed with the name of Major Worrell.

'Skepsey did come back to London with a rather damaged frontispiece,' Victor said. 'He can't have joined those people?'

'They may suit one of your militant peacemakers,' interposed Fenellan. 'The most placable creatures alive, and the surest for getting-up a shindy.'

'Suit him! They're the scandal of our streets.' Victor was pricked with a jealousy of them for beguiling him of his trusty servant.

'Look at your country, see where it shows its vitality,' said Colney. 'You don't see elsewhere any vein in movement—movement,' he harped on the word Victor constantly employed to express the thing he wanted to see. 'Think of that, when the procession sets your teeth on edge. They're honest foes of vice, and they move:—in England! Pulpit-preaching has no effect. *For gross maladies, gross remedies.* You may judge of what you are by the quality of the cure. Puritanism, I won't attempt to paint—it would barely be decent, but compare it with the spectacle of English frivolity, and you'll admit it to be the best show you make. It may still be the saving of you—on the level of the orderly ox: I've not observed that it aims at higher.—And talking of the pulpit, Barmby

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is off to the East, has accepted a Shoreditch curacy, Skepsey tells me.'

'So there's the reason for our not seeing him!' Victor turned to Nesta.

'Papa, you won't be angry with Skepsey if he has joined those people,' said Nesta. 'I'm sure he thinks of serving his country, Mr. Durance.'

Colney smiled on her. 'And you too?'

'If women knew how!'

'They're hitting on more ways at present than the men—in England.'

'But, Mr. Durance, it speaks well for England when they're allowed the chance here.'

'Good!' Fenellan exclaimed. 'And that upsets his placement of the modern national genders: Germany masculine, France feminine, Old England what remains.'

Victor ruffled and reddened on his shout of 'Neuter?'

Their circle widened. Nesta knew she was on promotion, by her being led about and introduced to ladies. They were encouraging with her. One of them, a Mrs. Marina Floyer, had recently raised a standard of feminine insurrection. She said: 'I hear your praises from Mr. Durance. He rarely praises. You have shown capacity to meditate on the condition of women, he says.'

Nesta drew a shorter breath, with a hope at heart. She speculated in the dark, as to whether her aim to serve and help was not so friendless. And did Mr. Durance approve? But surely she stood in a glorious England if there were men and women to welcome a girl to their councils. Oh! that is the broad free England where gentlemen and gentle-

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CHAPTER XXXVII The Mother: the Daughter

women accept of the meanest aid to cleanse the land of its iniquities, and do not suffer shame to smite a young face for touching upon horrors with a pure design.

She cried in her bosom: I feel! She had no other expression for that which is as near as great natures may come to the conceiving of the celestial spirit from an emissary angel; and she trembled, the fire ran through her. It seemed to her, that she would be called to help or that certainly they were nearing to an effacement of the woefullest of evils; and if not helping, it would still be a blessedness for her to kneel thanking heaven.

Society was being attacked and defended. She could but studiously listen. Her father was listening. The assailant was a lady; and she had a hearing, although she treated Society as a discrowned monarch on trial for an offence against a more precious: viz. the individual cramped by brutish laws: the individual with the ideas of our time, righteously claiming expansion out of the clutches of a narrow old-world disciplinarian—that giant hypocrite! She flung the gauntlet at externally venerable Institutions; and she had a hearing, where horrification, execration, the foul Furies of Conservatism would in a shortly antecedent day have been hissing and snakily lashing, hounding her to expulsion. Mrs. Marina Floyer gravely seconded her. Colney did the same. Victor turned sharp on him. 'Yes,' Colney said: 'we unfold the standard of extremes in this country, to get a single step taken: that's how we move: we threaten death to get footway. Now, mark: Society's errors will be admitted.'

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A gentleman spoke. He began by admitting Society's errors. Nevertheless, it so distinctly exists for the common good, that we may say of Society in relation to the individual, it is the body to the soul. We may wash, trim, purify, but we must not maim it. The assertion of our individuality in opposition to the Government of Society—this existing Society—is a toss of the cap for the erasure of our civilization, et cætera.

Platitudes can be of intense interest if they approach our case.—But, if you please, we ask permission to wash, trim, purify, and we do not get it.—But you have it!—Because we take it at our peril; and you, who are too cowardly to grant or withhold, call-up the revolutionary from the pits by your slackness: —etc. There was a pretty hot debate. Both assailant and defendant, to Victor's thinking, spoke well, and each the right thing: and he could have made use of both, but he could answer neither. He beat about for the cause of this deficiency, and discovered it in his position. Mentally, he was on the side of Society. Yet he was annoyed to find the attack was so easily answerable when the defence unfolded. But it was absurd to expect it would not be. And in fact, a position secretly rebellious is equal to water on the brain for stultifying us.

Before the controversy was over, a note in Nataly's handwriting called him home. She wrote: 'Make my excuses. C. D. will give Nesta and some lady dinner. A visitor here. Come alone, and without delay. Quite well, robust. Impatient to consult with you, nothing else.'

Nesta was happy to stay; and Victor set forth.

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CHAPTER XXXVII The Mother: the Daughter

The visitor? plainly Dudley. Nataly's trusting the girl to the chance of some lady being present, was unlike her. Dudley might be tugging at the cord; and the recent conversation upon Society, rendered one of its gilt pillars particularly estimable.—A person in the debate had declared this modern protest on behalf of individualism to represent Society's Criminal Trial. And it is likely to be a long one. And good for the world, that we see such a Trial! —Well said or not, undoubtedly Society is an old criminal: not much more advanced than the state of spiritual worship where bloody sacrifice was offered to a hungry Lord. But it has a case for pleading. We may liken it, as we have it now, to the bumping lumberer's raft; suitable along torrent waters until we come to smoother. Are we not on waters of a certain smoothness at the reflecting level?—enough to justify demands for a vessel of finer design. If Society is to subsist, it must have the human with the logical argument against the cry of the free-flags, instead of presenting a block's obtuseness. That, you need not hesitate to believe, will be rolled downward and disintegrated, sooner than later. A Society based on the logical concrete of humane considerateness:—a Society prohibiting to Mrs. Burman her wielding of a life-long rod. . . .

The personal element again to confuse inquiry!—And Skepsey and Barmby both of them bent on doing work without inquiry of any sort! They were enviable: they were good fellows. Victor clung to the theme because it hinted of next door to his lost Idea. He rubbed the back of his head, fancying a throb there.—Are civilized creatures incapable of

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abstract thought when their social position is dubious? For if so, we never can be quit of those we forsake.—Apparently Mrs. Burman's unfathomed power lay in her compelling him to summon the devilish in himself and play upon the impish in Society, that he might overcome her.

Victor's house-door stopped this current.

Nataly took his embrace.

'Nothing wrong?' he said, and saw the something. It was a favourable moment to tell her what she might not at another time regard as a small affair. 'News in the City to-day of that South London borough being vacated. Quatley urges me. A death again! I saw Pempton, too. Will you credit me when I tell you he carries his infatuation so far, that he has been investing in Japanese and Chinese Loans, because they are less meat-eaters than others, and vegetarians are more stable, and outlast us all!—Dudley the visitor?'

'Mr. Sowerby has been here,' she said, in a shaking low voice.

Victor held her hand and felt a squeeze more nervous than affectionate.

'To consult with me,' she added. 'My maid will go at ten to bring Nesta; Mr. Durance I can count on, to see her safe home. Ah!' she wailed.

Victor nodded, saying: 'I guess. And, my love, you will receive Mrs. John Cormyn to-morrow morning. I can't endure gaps. Gaps in our circle must never be. Do I guess?—I spoke to Colney about bringing her home.'

Nataly sighed: 'Ah! make what provision we will! Evil—— Mr. Sowerby has had a great deal to bear.'

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CHAPTER XXXVII
The Mother: the Daughter

'A worldling may think so.'

Her breast heaved, and the wave burst: but her restraining of tears froze her speech.

'Victor! Our Nesta! Mr. Sowerby is unable to explain. And how the Miss Duvidneys! . . . At that Brighton!'—The voice he heard was not his darling's deep rich note, it had dropped to toneless hoarseness: 'She has been permitted to make acquaintance—she has been seen riding with—she has called upon—Oh! it is one of those abandoned women. In her house! Our girl! Our Nesta! She was insulted by a man in the woman's house. She is talked of over Brighton. The mother!—the daughter! And grant me this—that never was girl more carefully . . . never till she was taken from me. Oh! do not forget. You will defend me? You will say, that her mother did with all her soul strive . . . It is not a rumour. Mr. Sowerby has had it confirmed.' A sob caught her voice.

Victor's hands caressed to console: 'Dudley does not propose to . . .?'

'Nesta must promise. . . . But how it happened? How! An acquaintance with—contact with!—Oh! cruel!' Each time she ceased speaking, the wrinkles of a shiver went over her, and the tone was of tears coming, but she locked them in.

'An accident!' said Victor; 'some misunderstanding—there can't be harm. Of course, she promises—hasn't to promise. How could a girl distinguish! He does not cast blame on her?'

'Dear, if you would go down to Dartrey to-morrow. He knows:—it is over the Clubs there; he will tell you, before a word to Nesta. Innocent, yes!

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Mr. Sowerby has not to be assured of that. Ignorant of the character of the dreadful woman? Ah, if I could ever in anything think her ignorant! She frightens me. Mr. Sowerby is indulgent. He does me justice. My duty to her—I must defend myself—has been my first thought. I said in my prayers—she at least! . . . We have to see the more than common reasons why she, of all girls, should—he did not hint it, he was delicate: her name must not be public.'

'Yes, yes, Dudley is without parallel as a gentleman,' said Victor. 'It does not suit me to hear the word "indulgent." My dear, if you were down there, you would discover that the talk was the talk of two or three men seeing our girl ride by—and she did ride with a troop: why, we've watched them along the parade, often. Clear as day how it happened! I'll go down early to-morrow.'

He fancied Nataly was appeased. And even out of this annoyance, there was the gain of her being won to favour Dudley's hitherto but tolerated suit.

Nataly also had the fancy, that the calm following on her anguish, was a moderation of it. She was kept strung to confide in her girl by the recent indebtedness to her for words heavenly in the strengthening comfort they gave. But no sooner was she alone than her torturing perplexities and her abasement of the hours previous to Victor's coming returned.

For a girl of Nesta's head could not be deceived; she had come home with a woman's intelligence of the world, hard knowledge of it—a knowledge drawn from foul wells, the unhappy mother imagined: she

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CHAPTER XXXVII The Mother: the Daughter

dreaded to probe to the depth of it. She had in her wounded breast the world's idea, that corruption must come of the contact with impurity.

Nataly renewed her cry of despair: 'The mother!—the daughter!'—her sole revelation of the heart's hollows in her stammered speaking to Victor.

She thanked heaven for the loneliness of her bed, where she could repeat: 'The mother!—the daughter!' hearing the world's words:—the daughter excused, by reason of her having such a mother; the mother unpitied for the bruiting of her brazen daughter's name: but both alike consigned to the corners of the world's dust-heaps. She cried out, that her pride was broken. Her pride, her last support of life, had gone to pieces. The tears she restrained in Victor's presence, were called on to come now, and she had none. It might be, that she had not strength for weeping. She was very weak. Rising from bed to lock her door against Nesta's entry to the room on her return at night, she could hardly stand: a chill and a clouding overcame her. The quitted bed seemed the haven of a drifted wreck to reach.

Victor tried the handle of a locked door in the dark of the early winter morning. 'The mother!—the daughter!' had swung a pendulum for some time during the night in him, too. He would rather have been subjected to the spectacle of tears than have heard that toneless voice, as it were the dry torrent-bed rolling blocks instead of melodious, if afflicting, waters.

He told Nesta not to disturb her mother, and murmured of a headache: 'Though, upon my word, the

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best cure for mama would be a look into Fredi's eyes!' he said, embracing his girl, quite believing in her, just a little afraid of her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Nataly, Nesta, and Dartrey Fenellan

Pleasant things, that come to us too late for our savour of the sweetness in them, toll ominously of life on the last walk to its end. Yesterday, before Dudley Sowerby's visit, Nataly would have been stirred where the tears we shed for happiness or repress at a flattery dwell when seeing her friend Mrs. John Cormyn enter her boudoir and hearing her speak repentantly, most tenderly. Mrs. John said: 'You will believe I have suffered, dear; I am half my weight, I do think': and she did not set the smile of responsive humour moving; although these two ladies had a key of laughter between them. Nataly took her kiss; held her hand, and at the parting kissed her. She would rather have seen her friend than not: so far she differed from a corpse; but she was near the likeness to the dead in the insensibility to any change of light shining on one who best loved darkness and silence. She cried to herself wilfully, that her pride was broken: as women do when they spurn at the wounding of a dignity they cannot protect and die to see bleeding; for in it they live.

The cry came of her pride unbroken, sore bruised, and after a certain space for recovery combative. She said: Any expiation I could offer where I did

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CHAPTER XXXVIII
Nataly, Nesta, and Dartrey Fenellan

injury, I would not refuse; I would humble myself and bless heaven for being able to pay my debt—what I can of it. All I contend against is, injustice. And she sank into sensational protests of her anxious care of her daughter, too proud to phrase them.

Her one great affliction, the scourging affliction of her utter loneliness;—an outcast from her family; daily, and she knew not how, more shut away from the man she loved; now shut away from her girl;—seemed under the hand of the angel of God. The abandonment of her by friends, was merely the light to show it.

Mid-day's post brought her a letter from Priscilla Graves, entreating to be allowed to call on her next day.—We are not so easily cast off! Nataly said bitterly, in relation to the lady whose offending had not been so great. She wrote: 'Come, if sure that you sincerely wish to.'

Having fasted, she ate at lunch in her dressing-room, with some taste of the food, haunted by an accusation of gluttony because of her eating at all, and a vile confession, that she was enabled to eat, owing to the receipt of Priscilla's empty letter: for her soul's desire was to be doing a deed of expiation, and the macerated flesh seemed her assurance to herself of the courage to make amends.—I must have some strength, she said wearifully, in apology for the morsel consumed.

Nesta's being in the house with her, became an excessive irritation. Doubts of the girl's possible honesty to speak a reptile truth under question; amazement at her boldness to speak it; hatred of the mouth that could: and loathing of the words, the

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theme; and abomination of herself for conjuring fictitious images to rouse real emotions; all ran counterthreads, that produced a mad pattern in the mind, affrighting to reason: and then, for its preservation, reason took a super-rational leap, and ascribed the terrible injustice of this last cruel stroke to the divine scourge, recognized divine by the selection of the mortal spot for chastisement. She clasped her breast, and said: It is mortal. And that calmed her.

She said, smiling: I never felt my sin until this blow came! Therefore the blow was proved divine. Ought it not to be welcomed?—and she appearing no better than one of those, the leprous of the sex! And brought to acknowledgement of the likeness by her daughter!

Nataly drank the poison distilled from her exclamations and was ice. She had denied herself to Nesta's redoubled petition. Nesta knocking at the door a third time and calling, tore the mother two ways: to have her girl on her breast or snap their union in a word with an edge. She heard the voice of Dartrey Fenellan.

He was admitted. 'No, dear,' she said to Nesta; and Nesta's, 'My own mother,' consentingly said, in tender resignation, as she retired, sprang a stinging tear to the mother's eyelids.

Dartrey looked at the door closing on the girl.

'Is it a very low woman?' Nataly asked him in a Church whisper, with a face abashed.

'It is not,' said he, quick to meet any abruptness.

'She must be cunning.'

'In the ordinary way. We say it of Puss before the hounds.'

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CHAPTER XXXVIII
Nataly, Nesta, and Dartrey Fenellan

'To deceive a girl like Nesta!'

'She has done no harm.'

'Dartrey, you speak to a mother. You have seen the woman? She is?—ah!'

'She is womanly, womanly.'

'Quite one of those . . .?'

'My dear soul! You can't shake them off in that way. She is one of *us*. If we have the class, we can't escape from it. They are not to bear all the burden because they exist. We are the bigger debtors. I tell you she is womanly.'

'It sounds like horrid cynicism.'

'Friends of mine would abuse it for the reverse.'

'Do not make me hate your chivalry. This woman is a rod on my back. Provided only she has not dropped venom into Nesta's mind!'

'Don't fear!'

'Can you tell me you think she has done no harm to my girl?'

'To Nesta herself?—not any: not to a girl like your girl.'

'To my girl's name? Speak at once. But I know she has. She induced Nesta to go to her house. My girl was insulted in this woman's house.'

Dartrey's forehead ridged with his old fury and a gust of present contempt. 'I can tell you this, that the fellow who would think harm of it, knowing the facts, is not worthy of touching the tips of the fingers of your girl.'

'She is talked of!'

'A good-looking girl out riding with a handsome woman on a parade of idlers!'

'The woman is notorious.' Nataly said it shivering.

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He shook his head. 'Not true.'

'She has an air of a lady?'

'She sits a horse well.'

'Would she to any extent deceive me—impose on me here?'

'No.'

'Ah!' Nataly moaned.

'But what?' said Dartrey. 'There was no pretence. Her style is not worse than that of some we have seen. There was no effort to deceive. The woman's plain for you and me to read, she has few of the arts; one or two tricks, if you like: and these were not needed for use. There are women who have them, and have not been driven or let slip into the wilderness.'

'Yes; I know!—those ideas of yours!' Nataly had once admired him for his knightliness toward the weakest women and the women underfoot. 'You have spoken to this woman? She boasted of acquaintance with Nesta?'

'She thanked God for having met her.'

'Is it one of the hysterical creatures?'

Mrs. Marsett appeared fronting Dartrey.

He laughed to himself. 'A clever question. There is a leaning to excitement of manner at times. It's not hysteria. Allow for her position.'

Nataly took the unintended blow, and bowed to it; and still more harshly said: 'What rank of life does the woman come from?'

'The class educated for a skittish career by your popular Stage and your Book-stalls. I am not precise?'

'Leave Mr. Durance. Is she in any degree

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CHAPTER XXXVIII Nataly, Nesta, and Dartrey Fenellan

commonly well-bred? . . . behaviour, talk — her English.'

'I trench on Mr. Durance in replying. Her English is passable. You may hear . . .'

'Everywhere, of course! And this woman of slipshod English and excited manners imposed upon Nesta!'

'It would not be my opinion.'

'Did *not* impose on her!'

'Not many would impose on Nesta Radnor for long.'

'Think what that says, Dartrey!'

'You have had a detestable version of the story.'

'Because an excited creature thanks God to you for having met her!'

'She may. She's a better woman for having met her. Don't suppose we're for supernatural conversions. The woman makes no show of that. But she has found a good soul among her sex—her better self in youth, as one guesses; and she is grateful—feels farther from exile in consequence. She has found a *lady* to take her by the hand!—not a common case. She can never go to the utterly bad after knowing Nesta. I forget if she says it; I say it. You have heard the story from one of your conventional gentlemen.'

'A true gentleman. I have reason to thank him. He has not your ideas on these matters, Dartrey. He is very sensitive . . . on Nesta's behalf.'

'With reference to marriage. I'll own I prefer another kind of gentleman. I've had my experience of that kind of gentleman. Many of the kind have added their spot to the outcasts abominated for uncleanness—in holy unction. Many?—I won't say all;

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but men who consent to hear black words pitched at them, and help to set good women facing away from them, are pious dolts or rascal dogs of hypocrites. They, if you 'll let me quote Colney Durance to you to-day—and how is it he is not in favour?—they are tempting the Lord to turn the pillars of Society into pillars of salt. Down comes the house. And priests can rest in sight of it!—They ought to be dead against the sanctimony that believes it excommunicates when it curses. The relationship is not dissolved so cheaply, though our Society affects to think it is. Barmby 's off to the East End of this London, Victor informs me:—good fellow! And there he 'll be groaning over our vicious nature. Nature is not more responsible for vice than she is for inhumanity. Both bad, but the latter 's the worse of the two.'

Nataly interposed: 'I see the contrast, and see whom it 's to strike.'

Dartrey sent a thought after his meaning. 'Hardly that. Let it stand. He 's only one with the world: but he shares the criminal infamy for crushing hope out of its frailest victims. They 're that—no sentiment. What a world, too, look behind it!—brutal because brutish. The world may go hang: we expect more of your gentleman. To hear of Nesta down there, and doubt that she was about good work;—and come complaining! He had the privilege of speaking to her, remonstrating, if he wished. There are men who think—men!—the plucking of sinners out of the mire a dirty business. They depute it to certain officials. And your women—it 's the taste of the world to have them educated so, that they can as little take the humane as the enlightened view.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII Nataly, Nesta, and Dartrey Fenellan

Except, by the way, sometimes, in secret;—they have a sisterly breast. In secret, they do occasionally think as they feel. In public, the brass mask of the Idol they call Propriety commands or supplies their feelings and thoughts. I won't repeat my reasons for educating them differently. At present we have but half the woman to go through life with—and thank you.'

Dartrey stopped. 'Don't be disturbed,' he added. 'There 's no ground for alarm. Not of any sort.'

Nataly said: 'What name?'

'Her name is Mrs. Marsett.'

'The name is . . .?'

'Captain Marsett: will be Sir Edward. He came back from the Continent yesterday.'

A fit of shuddering seized Nataly. It grew in violence, and speaking out of it, with a pause of sickly empty chatter of the jaws, she said: 'Always that name?'

'Before the maiden name? May have been or not.'

'Not, you say?'

'I don't accurately know.'

Dartrey sprang to his legs. 'My dear soul! dear friend—one of the best! if we go on fencing in the dark, there 'll be wounds. Your way of taking this affair disappointed me. Now I understand. It 's the disease of a trouble, to fly at comparisons. No real one exists. I wished to protect the woman from a happier sister's judgement, to save you from alarm concerning Nesta:—quite groundless, if you 'll believe me. Come, there 's plenty of benevolent writing abroad on these topics now: facts are more looked at, and a good woman may join us in taking them without the

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horrors and loathings of angels rather too much given to claim distinction from the luckless. A girl who 's unprotected may go through adventures before she fixes, and be a creature of honest intentions. Better if protected, we all agree. Better also if the world did not favour the girl's multitude of enemies. Your system of not dealing with facts openly is everyway favourable to them. I am glad to say, Victor recognizes what corruption that spread of wealth is accountable for. And now I must go and have a talk with the—what a change from the blue butterfly! Eaglet, I ought to have said. I dine with you, for Victor may bring news.'

'Would anything down there be news to you, Dartrey?'

'He makes it wherever he steps.'

'He would reproach me for not detaining you. Tell Nesta I have to lie down after talking. She has a child's confidence in you.'

A man of middle age! he said to himself. It is the particular ejaculation which tames the senior whose heart is for a dash of holiday. He resolved, that the mother might trust to the discretion of a man of his age; and he went down to Nesta, grave with the weight his count of years should give him. Seeing her, the light of what he now knew of her was an ennobling equal to celestial. For this fair girl was one of the active souls of the world—his dream to discover in woman's form. She, the little Nesta, the tall pure-eyed girl before him, was, young though she was, already in the fight with evil: a volunteer of the army of the simply Christian. The worse for it? Sowerby would think so. She was not of the order

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CHAPTER XXXVIII
Nataly, Nesta, and Dartrey Fenellan

of young women who, in sheer ignorance or in voluntary, consent to the peace with evil, and are kept externally safe from the smirch of evil, and are the ornaments of their country, glory of a country prizing ornaments higher than qualities.

Dartrey could have been momentarily incredulous of things revealed by Mrs. Marsett—not incredulous of the girl's heroism: that capacity he caught and gauged in her shape of head, cut of mouth, and the measurements he was accustomed to make at a glance:—but her beauty, or the form of beauty which was hers, argued against her having set foot of thought in our fens. Here and far there we meet a young saint vowed to service along by those dismal swamps: and saintly she looks: not of this earth. Nesta was of the blooming earth. Where do we meet girl or woman comparable to garden-flowers, who can dare to touch to lift the spotted of her sex? He was puzzled by Nesta's unlikeness in deeds and in aspect. He remembered her eyes, on the day when he and Colonel Sudley beheld her; presently he was at quiet grapple with her mind. His doubts cleared off. Then the question came, How could a girl of heroical character be attached to the man Sowerby? That entirely passed belief.

And was it possible his wishes beguiled his hearing? Her tones were singularly vibrating.

They talked for a while before, drawing a deep breath, she said: 'I fancy I am in disgrace with my mother.'

'You have a suspicion why?' said he.

'I have.'

She would have told him why: the words were at

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her lips. Previous to her emotion on the journey home, the words would have come out. They were arrested by the thunder of the knowledge, that the nobleness in him drawing her to be able to speak of scarlet matter, was personally worshipped.

CHAPTER XXXVIII
Nataly, Nesta, and Dartrey Fenellan

He attributed the full rose upon her cheeks to the forbidding subject.

To spare pain, he said: 'No misunderstanding with the dear mother will last the day through. Can I help?'

'Oh, Captain Dartrey!'

'Drop the captain. Dartrey will do.'

'How could I!'

'You 're not wanting in courage, Nesta.'

'Hardly for that!'

'By-and-by, then.'

'Though I could not say *Mr.* Fenellan.'

'You see; Dartrey, it must be.'

'If I could!'

'But the fellow is not a captain: and he is a friend, an old friend, very old friend: he 'll be tipped with grey in a year or two.'

'I might be bolder then.'

'Imagine it now. There is no disloyalty in your calling your friends by their names.'

Her nature rang to the implication. 'I am not bound.'

Dartrey hung fast, speculating on her visibly: 'I heard you were.'

'No. I must be free.'

'It is not an engagement?'

'Will you laugh?—I have never quite known. My father desired it: and my desire is to please him. I

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CHAPTER XXXVIII
Nataly, Nesta, and Dartrey Fenellan

think I am vain enough to think I read through blinds and shutters. The engagement—what there was—has been, to my reading, broken more than once. I have not considered it, to settle my thoughts on it, until lately: and now I may suspect it to be broken. I have given cause—if it is known. There is no blame elsewhere. I am not unhappy, Captain Dartrey.'

'Captain by courtesy. Very well. Tell me how Nesta judges the engagement to be broken?'

She was mentally phrasing before she said: 'Absence.'

'He was here yesterday.'

All that the visit embraced was in her expressive look, as of sight drawing inward, like our breath in a spell of wonderment. 'Then I understand; it enlightens me. My own mother!—my poor mother! he should have come to me. I was the guilty person, not she; and she is the sufferer. That, if in life were direct retribution!—but the very meaning of having a heart, is to suffer through others or for them.'

'You have soon seen that, dear girl,' said Dartrey.

'So, my own mother, and loving me as she does, blames me!' Nesta sighed; she took a sharp breath. 'You? do you blame me too?'

He pressed her hand, enamoured of her instantaneous divination and heavenly candour.

But he was admonished, that to speak high approval would not be honourable advantage taken of the rival condemning; and he said: 'Blame? Some think it is not always the right thing to do the right thing. I've made mistakes, with no bad design. A good mother's view is not often wrong.'

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CHAPTER XXXVIII
Nataly, Nesta, and Dartrey Fenellan

'You pressed my hand,' she murmured.

That certainly had said more.

'Glad to again,' he responded. It was uttered airily and was meant to be as lightly done.

Nesta did not draw back her hand. 'I feel strong when you press it.' Her voice wavered, and as when we hear a flask sing thin at the filling, ceased upon evidence of a heart surcharged. How was he to relax the pressure!—he had to give her the strength she craved: and he vowed it should be but for half a minute, half a minute longer.

Her tears fell; she eyed him steadily; she had the look of sunlight in shower.

'Oldish men are the best friends for you, I suppose,' he said; and her gaze turned elusive phrases to vapour.

He was compelled to see the fiery core of the rain-cloud lighting it for a revealment, that allowed as little as it retained of a shadow of obscurity.

The sight was keener than touch and the run of blood with blood to quicken slumbering seeds of passion.

But here is the place of broken ground and tangle, which calls to honourable men, not bent on sport, to be wary to guard the gunlock. He stopped the word at his mouth. It was not in him to stop or moderate the force of his eyes. She met them with the slender unbendingness that was her own; a feminine of inspirited manhood. There was no soft expression, only the direct shot of light, on both sides; conveying as much as is borne from sun to earth, from earth to sun. And when such an exchange has come between the two, they are past plighting, they are the wedded one.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII
Nataly, Nesta, and Dartrey Fenellan

Nesta felt it, without asking whether she was loved. She was his. She had not a thought of the word of love or the being beloved. Showers of painful blissfulness went through her, as the tremours of a shocked frame, while she sat quietly, showing scarce a sign; and after he had let her hand go, she had the pressure on it. The quivering intense of the moment of his eyes and grasp was lord of her, lord of the day and of all days coming. That is how Love slays Death. Never did girl so give her soul.

She would have been the last to yield it unreservedly to a man untrusted for the character she worshipped. But she could have given it to Dartrey, despite his love of another, because it was her soul, without any of the cravings, except to bestow.

He perceived, that he had been carried on for the number of steps which are countless miles and do not permit the retreat across the desert behind; and he was in some amazement at himself, remindful of the different nature of our restraining power when we have a couple playing on it. Yet here was this girl, who called him up to the heights of young life again: and a brave girl; and she bled for the weak, had no shrinking from the women underfoot: for the reason, that she was a girl sovereignly pure, angelically tender. Was there a point of honour to hold him back?

Nataly entered the room. She kissed Nesta, and sat silent.

'Mother, will you speak of me to him, if I go out?' Nesta said.

'We have spoken,' her mother replied, vexed by the unmaidenly allusion to that theme.

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She would have asked, How did you guess I knew of it?—but that the, Why should I speak of you to him?—struck the louder note in her bosom: and then, What is there that this girl cannot guess!—filled the mother's heart with apprehensive dread: and an inward cry, What things will she not set going, to have them discussed! and the appalling theme, sitting offensive though draped in their midst, was taken for a proof of the girl's unblushingness. After standing as one woman against the world so long, Nataly was relieved to be on the side of a world now convictedly unjust to her in the confounding of her with the shameless. Her mind had taken the brand of that thought:—And Nesta had brought her to it:—And Dudley Sowerby, a generous representative of the world, had kindly, having the deputed power to do so, sustained her, only partially blaming Nesta, not casting them off; as the world, with which Nataly felt, under a sense of the protection calling up all her gratitude to young Dudley, would have approved his doing.

She was passing through a fit of the cowardice peculiar to the tediously strained, who are being more than commonly tried—persecuted, as they say when they are not supplicating their tyrannical Authority for aid. The world will continue to be indifferent to their view of it and behaviour toward it until it ceases to encourage the growth of hypocrites.

These are moments when the faces we are observing drop their charm, showing us our perversion internal, if we could but reflect, to see it. Very many thousand times above Dudley Sowerby, Nataly ranked Dartrey

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CHAPTER XXXVIII Nataly, Nesta, and Dartrey Fenellan

Fenellan; and still she looked at him, where he sat beside Nesta, ungenially, critical of the very features, jealously in the interests of Dudley; and recollecting, too, that she had once prayed for one exactly resembling Dartrey Fenellan to be her Nesta's husband. But, as she would have said, that was before the indiscretion of her girl had shown her to require for her husband a man whose character and station guaranteed protection instead of inciting to rebellion. And Dartrey, the loved and prized, was often in the rebel ranks; he was dissatisfied with matters as they are; was restless for action, angry with a country denying it to him; he made enemies, he would surely bring down inquiries about Nesta's head, and cause the forgotten or quiescent to be stirred; he would scarcely be the needed hand for such a quiver of the lightnings as Nesta was.

Dartrey read Nataly's brows. This unwonted uncomeliness of hers was an indication to one or other of our dusky pits, not a revealing.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

He read her more closely when Arlington brought in the brown paper envelope of the wires—to which the mate of Victor ought to have become accustomed. She took it; her eyelids closed, and her features were driven to whiteness. 'Only these telegrams,' she said, in apology.

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

'Lakelands on fire?' Dartrey murmured to Nesta; and she answered: 'I should not be sorry.'

Nataly coldly asked her why she would not be sorry.

Dartrey interposed: 'I'm sure she thinks Lakelands worries her mother.'

'That ranks low among the worries,' Nataly sighed, opening the envelope.

Nesta touched her arm: 'Mother! even before Captain Dartrey, if you will let me!'—she turned to him:—'before . . .' at the end of her breath she said: 'Dartrey Fenellan. You shall see my whole heart, mother.'

Her mother looked from her at him.

'Victor returns by the last train. He telegraphs, that he dines with——' She handed the paper to Dartrey.

'Marsett,' he read aloud; and she flushed; she was angry with him for not knowing, that the name was a term of opprobrium flung at her.

'It's to tell you he has done what he thought good,' said Dartrey. 'In other words, as I interpret, he has completed his daughter's work. So we won't talk about it till he comes. You have no company this evening?'

'Oh! there is a pause to-night! It's nearly as unceasing as your brother Simeon's old French lady in the *ronde* with her young bridegroom, till they danced her to pieces. I do get now and then an hour's repose,' Nataly added, with a vision springing up of the person to whom the story had applied.

'My dear, you are a good girl to call me Dartrey,' the owner of the name said to Nesta.

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

Nataly saw them both alert, in the terrible manner peculiar to both, for the directest of the bare statements. She could have protested, that her love of truth was on an equality with theirs; and certainly, that her regard for decency was livelier. Pass the deficiency in a man. But a girl who could speak, by allusion, of Mrs. Marsett—of the existence of a Mrs. Marsett—in the presence of a man: and he excusing, encouraging: and this girl her own girl;—it seemed to her, that the world reeled; she could hardly acknowledge the girl; save under the penitential admission of her sins having found her out.

She sent Nesta to her room when they went upstairs to dress, unable to endure her presence after seeing her show a placid satisfaction at Dartrey's nod to the request for him to sleep in the house that night. It was not at all a gleam of pleasure, hardly an expression; it was a manner of saying, One drop more in my cup of good fortune!—an absurd and an offensive exhibition of silly optimism of the young, blind that they are!

For were it known, and surely the happening of it would be known, that Dudley Sowerby had shaken off the Nesta of no name, who was the abominable Mrs. Marsett's friend, a whirlwind with a trumpet would sweep them into the wilderness on a blast frightfuller than any ever heard.

Nataly had a fit of weeping for want of the girl's embrace, against whom her door was jealously locked. She hoped these two would talk much, madly if they liked, during dinner, that she might not be sensible, through any short silence, of the ardour animating them: especially glowing in Nesta, ready behind

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her quiet mask to come brazenly forth. But both of them were mercilessly ardent; and a sickness of the fear, that they might fall on her to capture her and hurry her along with them perforce of the allayed, once fatal, inflammable element in herself, shook the warmth from her limbs: causing her to say to herself aloud in a ragged hoarseness, very strangely: Every thought of mine now has a physical effect on me!

CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

They had not been two minutes together when she descended to them. Yet she saw the girl's heart brimming, either with some word spoken to her or for joy of an unmaidenly confession. During dinner they talked, without distressful pauses. Whatever said, whatever done, was manifestly another drop in Nesta's foolish happy cup. Could it be all because Dartrey Fenellan countenanced her acquaintance with that woman? The mother had lost hold of her. The tortured mother had lost hold of herself.

Dartrey in the course of the evening, begged to hear the contralto; and Nataly, refusing, was astounded by the admission in her blank mind of the truth of man's list of charges against her sex, starting from their capriciousness: for she could have sung in a crowded room, and she had now a desire for company, for stolid company or giddy, an ocean of it. This led to her thinking, that the world of serious money-getters, and feasts, and the dance, the luxurious displays, and the reverential Sunday service, will always ultimately prove itself right in opposition to critics and rebels, and to any one vainly trying to stand alone: and the thought annihilated her; for

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

she was past the age of the beginning again, and no footing was left for an outsider not self-justified in being where she stood. She heard Dartrey's praise of Nesta's voice for tearing her mother's bosom with notes of intolerable sweetness; and it was haphazard irony, no doubt; we do not the less bleed for the accident of a shot.

At last, after midnight Victor arrived.

Nesta most impudently expected to be allowed to remain. 'Pray, go, dear,' her mother said. Victor kissed his Fredi. 'Some time to-morrow,' said he; and she forbore to beseech him.

He stared, though mildly, at sight of her taking Dartrey's hand for the good night and deliberately putting her lips to it.

Was she a girl whose notion of rectifying one wrong thing done, was to do another? Nataly could merely observe. A voice pertaining to no one present, said in her ear:—Mothers have publicly slapped their daughters' faces for less than that!—It was the voice of her incapacity to cope with the girl. She watched Nesta's passage from the room, somewhat affected by the simple bearing for which she was reproaching her.

'And our poor darling has not seen a mountain this year!' Victor exclaimed, to have mentionable grounds for pitying his girl. 'I promised Fredi she should never count a year without Highlands or Alps. You remember, mama?—down in the West Highlands. Fancy the dear bit of bundle, Dartrey!—we had laid her in her bed; she was about seven or eight; and there she lay wide awake.—"What 's Fredi thinking of?"—"I 'm thinking of the tops of the mountains at

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night, dada."—She would climb them now; she has the legs.'

CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

Nataly said: 'You have some report to make. You *dined* with those people?'

'The Marsetts: yes:—well-suited couple enough. It's to happen before Winter ends—at once; before Christmas; positively before next Spring. Fredi's doing! He has to manage, arrange.—She's a good-looking woman, good height, well-rounded; well-behaved, too: she won't make a bad Lady Marsett. Every time that woman spoke of our girl, the tears jumped to her eyelids.'

'Come to me before you go to bed,' Nataly said, rising, her voice foundering; 'Good night, Dartrey.'

She turned to the door; she could not trust herself to shake hands with composure. Not only was it a nauseous mixture she was forced to gulp from Victor, it burned like a poison.

'Really Fredi's doing—chiefly,' said Victor, as soon as Dartrey and he were alone, comfortably settled in the smoking-room. 'I played the man of pomp with Marsett—good heavy kind of creature: attached to the woman. She's the better horse, as far as brains go. Good enough Lady Marsett. I harped on Major Worrell: my daughter insulted. He knew of it—spoke of you properly. The man offered all apologies; has told the Major he is no gentleman, not a fit associate for gentlemen:—quite so:—and has cut him dead. Will marry her, as I said, make her as worthy as he can of the honour of my daughter's acquaintance. Rather comical grimace, when he vowed he'd fasten the tie. He doesn't like marriage. But he can't give her up. And she's for patronizing the

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

institution. But she is ready to say good-bye to him: "rather than see the truest lady in the world insulted":—her words. And so he swallows his dose for health, and looks a trifle sourish. Antecedents, I suppose: has to stomach them. But if a man's fond of a woman—if he knows he saves her from slipping lower—and it's an awful world, for us to let a woman be under its wheels:—I say, a woman who has a man to lean on, unless she's as downright corrupt as two or three of the men we've known:—upon my word, Dartrey, I come round to some of your ideas on these matters. It's this girl of mine, this wee bit of girl in her little nightshirt with the frill, astonishes me most:—"thinking of the tops of the mountains at night!" She has positively done the whole of this work—main part. I smiled when I left the house, to have to own our little Fredi starting us all on the road. It seems, Marsett had sworn he would; amorous vow, you know; he never came nearer to doing it. I hope it's his better mind now; I do hope the man won't have cause to regret it. He speaks of Nesta—sort of rustic tone of awe. Mrs. Marsett has impressed him. He expects the title soon, will leave the army—the poor plucked British army, as you call it!—and lead the life of a country squire: hunting! Well, it's not only the army, it's over Great Britain, with this infernal wealth of ours!—and all for pleasure—eh?—or Paradise lost for a sugar plum! Eh, Dartrey? Upon my word, it appears to me, Esau's the Englishman, Jacob the German, of these times. I wonder old Colney hasn't said it. If we're not plucked, as your regiments are of the officers who have learnt their work, we're

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emasculated:—the nation's half made-up of the idle and the servants of the idle.'

'Ay, and your country squires and your manufacturers contrive to give the army a body of consumptive louts fit for nothing else than to take the shilling—and not worth it,' said Dartrey.

'Sounds like old Colney,' Victor remarked to himself. 'But, believe me, I'm ashamed of the number of servants who wait on me. It wouldn't so much matter, as Skepsey says, if they were trained to arms and self-respect. That little fellow Skepsey's closer to the right notion, and the right practice, too, than any of us. With his Matilda Pridden! He has jumped out of himself to the proper idea of women, too. And there's a man who has been up three times before the magistrates, and is considered a disorderly subject—one among the best of English citizens, I declare! I never think of Skepsey without the most extraordinary, witless kind of envy—as if he were putting in action an idea I once had and never quite got hold of again. The match for him is Fredi. She threatens to be just as devoted, just as simple, as he. I positively doubt whether any of us could stop her, if she had set herself to do a thing she thought right.'

'I should not like to think our trying it possible,' said Dartrey.

'All very well, but it's a rock ahead. We shall have to alter our course, my friend. You know, I dined with that couple, after the private twenty minutes with Marsett:—he formally propounded the invitation, as we were close on his hour, rather late: and I wanted to make the woman happy, besides

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

putting a seal of cordiality on his good intentions —politic! And subsequently I heard from her, that —you 'll think nothing of it!—Fredi promised to stand by her at the altar.'

Dartrey said, shrugging: 'She needn't do that.'

'So we may say. You 're dealing with Nesta Victoria. Spare me a contest with that girl, I undertake to manage any man or woman living.'

'When the thing to be done is thought right by her.'

'But can we always trust her judgement, my dear Dartrey?'

'In this case, she would argue, that her resolution to keep her promise would bind or help to bind Marsett to fulfil his engagement.'

'Odd, her mother has turned dead round in favour of that fellow Dudley Sowerby! I don't complain; it suits; but one thinks—eh?—women!'

'Well, yes, one thinks or should think, that if you insist on having women rooted to the bed of the river, they 'll veer with the tides, like water-weeds, and no wonder.'

'Your heterodoxy on that subject is a mania, Dartrey. We can't have women independent.'

'Then don't be exclaiming about their vagaries.'

Victor mused: 'It 's wonderful: that little girl of mine!—good height now: but what a head she has! Oh, she 'll listen to reason: only mark what I say: —with that quiet air of hers, the husband, if a young fellow, will imagine she 's the most docile of wives in the world. And as to wife, I 'm not of the contrary opinion. But quâ individual female, supposing her to have laid fast hold of an idea of duty, it 's he

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

who 'll have to turn the corner second, if they 're to trot in the yoke together. Or it may be an idea of service to a friend—or to her sex! That Mrs. Marsett says she feels for—"bleeds" for her sex. The poor woman didn't show to advantage with me, because she was in a fever to please:—talks in jerks, hot phrases. She holds herself well. At the end of the dinner she behaved better. Odd, you can teach women with hints and a lead. But Marsett's Marsett to the end. Rather touching!—the poor fellow said: Deuce of a bad look-out for me if Judith doesn't have a child! First-rate sportsman, I hear. He should have thought of his family earlier. You know, Dartrey, the case is to be argued for the family as well. You won't listen. And for Society too! Off you go.'

A battery was opened on that wall of composite.

'Ah, well,' said Victor. 'But I may have to beg your help, as to the so-called promise to stand at the altar. I don't mention it upstairs.'

He went to Nataly's room.

She was considerately treated, and was aware of being dandled, that she might have sleep.

She consented to it, in a loathing of the topic.—Those women invade us—we cannot keep them out! was her inward cry: with a reverberation of the unfailing accompaniment:—The world holds you for one of them!

Victor tasked her too much when his perpetual readiness to doat upon his girl for whatever she did, set him exalting Nesta's conduct. She thought: Was Nesta so sympathetic with her mother of late by reason of a moral insensibility to the offence?

This was her torture through the night of a labour-

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

ing heart, that travelled to one dull shock, again and again repeated:—the apprehended sound, in fact, of Dudley Sowerby's knock at the street door. Or sometimes a footman handed her his letter, courteously phrased to withdraw from the alliance. Or else he came to a scene with Nesta, and her mother was dragged into it, and the intolerable subject steamed about her. The girl was visioned as deadly. She might be indifferent to the protection of Dudley's name. Robust, sanguine, Victor's child, she might—her mother listened to a devil's whisper:—but no; Nesta's aim was at the heights; she was pure in mind as in body. No, but the world would bring the accusation; and the world would trace the cause: Heredity, it would say. Would it say falsely? Nataly harped on the interrogation until she felt her existence dissolving to a dark stain of the earth, and she found herself wondering at the breath she drew, doubting that another would follow, speculating on the cruel force which keeps us to the act of breathing.—Though I could draw wild blissful breath if I were galloping across the moors! her worn heart said to her youth: and out of ken of the world, I could regain a portion of my self-esteem.—Nature thereat renewed her old sustainment with gentle murmurs, that were supported by Dr. Themison's account of the virtuous married lady who chafed at the yoke on behalf of her sex, and deemed the independent union the ideal. Nataly's brain had a short gallop over moorland. It brought her face to face with Victor's girl, and she dropped once more to her remorse in herself and her reproaches of Nesta. The girl had inherited from her father something of the cataract's force which won

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

its way by catching or by mastering, uprooting, ruining!

In the morning she was heavily asleep. Victor left word with Nesta, that the dear mother was not to be disturbed. Consequently, when Dudley called to see Mrs. Victor Radnor, he was informed that Miss Radnor would receive him.

Their interview lasted an hour.

Dudley came to Victor in the City about luncheon time. His perplexity of countenance was eloquent. He had, before seeing the young lady, digested an immense deal: more, as it seemed to him, than any English gentleman should be asked to consume. She now referred him to her father, who had spent a day in Brighton, and would, she said, explain whatever there was to be explained. But she added, that if she was expected to abandon a friend, she could not. Dudley had argued with her upon the nature of friendship, the measurement of its various dues; he had lectured on the choice of friends, the impossibility for young ladies, necessarily inexperienced, to distinguish the right class of friends, the dangers they ran in selecting friends unwarranted by the stamp of honourable families.

'And what did Fredi say to that?' Victor inquired.

'Miss Radnor said—I may be dense, I cannot comprehend—that the precepts were suitable for seminaries of Pharisees. When it is a question of a young lady associating with a notorious woman!'

'Not notorious. You spoil your case if you "speak extremely," as a friend says. I saw her yesterday. She worships "Miss Radnor."'

'Nesta will know when she is older; she will thank

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

me,' Dudley said hurriedly. 'As it is at present, I may reckon, I hope, that the association ceases. Her name—I have to consider my family.'

'Good anchorage! You must fight it out with the girl. And depend upon this—you 're not the poorer for being the husband of a girl of character; unless you try to bridle her. She belongs to her time. I don't mind owning to you, she has given me a lead.—Fredi 'll be merry to-night. Here 's a letter I have from the Sanfredini, dated Milan, fresh this morning; invitation to bring the god-child to her villa on Como in May; desirous to embrace her. She wrote to the office. Not a word of her *duque*. She has pitched him to the winds. You may like to carry it off to Fredi and please her.'

'I have business,' Dudley replied.

'Away to it, then!' said Victor. 'You stand by me?—we expect our South London borough to be open in January; early next year, at least; may be February. You have family interest there.'

'Personally, I will do my best,' Dudley said; and he escaped, feeling, with the universal censor's angry spite, that the revolutions of the world had made one of the wealthiest of City men the head of a set of Bohemians. And there are eulogists of the modern time! And the man's daughter was declared to belong to it! A visit in May to the Italian cantatrice separated from her husband, would render the maiden an accomplished flinger of caps over the windmills.

At home Victor discovered, that there was not much more than a truce between Nesta and Nataly. He had a medical hint from Dr. Themison, and he counselled his girl to humour her mother as far as could be:

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

particularly in relation to Dudley, whom Nataly now, woman-like, after opposing, strongly favoured. How are we ever to get a clue to the labyrinthine convolutions and changeful motives of the sex! Dartrey's theories were absurd. Did Nataly think them dangerous for a young woman? The guess hinted at a clue of some sort to the secret of her veering.

'Mr. Sowerby left me with an adieu,' said Nesta.

'Mr. Sowerby! My dear, he is bound, bound in honour, bound at heart. You did not dismiss him?'

'I repeated the word he used. I thought of mother. The blood leaves her cheeks at a disappointment now. She has taken to like him.'

'Why, you like him!'

'I could not vow.'

'Tush.'

'Ah, don't press me, dada. But you will see, he has disengaged himself.'

He had done it, though not in formal speech. Slow digestion of his native antagonism to these Bohemians, to say nothing of his judicial condemnation of them, brought him painfully round to the writing of a letter to Nataly; cunningly addressed to the person on whom his instinct told him he had the strongest hold.

She schooled herself to discuss the detested matter forming Dudley's grievance and her own with Nesta; and it was a woeful half-hour for them. But Nataly was not the weeper.

Another interview ensued between Nesta and her suitor. Dudley bore no resemblance to Mr. Barmby, who refused to take the word no from her, and had taken it, and had gone to do holy work, for which she

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

revered him. Dudley took the word, leaving her to imagine freedom, until once more her mother or her father, inspired by him, came interceding, her mother actually supplicating. So that the reality of Dudley's love rose to conception like a London dawn over Nesta; and how, honourably, decently, positively, to sever herself from it, grew to be an ill-visaged problem. She glanced in soul at Dartrey Fenellan for help; she had her wild thoughts. Having once called him Dartrey, the virginal barrier to thoughts was broken; and but for love of her father, for love and pity of her mother, she would have ventured the step to make the man who had her whole being in charge accept or reject her. Nothing else appeared in prospect. Her father and mother were urgently one to favour Dudley; and the sensitive gentleman presented himself to receive his wound and to depart with it. But always he returned. At last, as if under tuition, he refrained from provoking a wound; he stood there to win her upon any terms; and he was a handsome figure, acknowledged by the damsel to be increasing in good looks as more and more his pretensions became distasteful to her. The slight cast of sourness on his lower features had almost vanished, his nature seemed to have enlarged. He complimented her for her 'generous benevolence,' vaguely, yet with evident sincereness; he admitted, that the modern world is 'attempting difficulties with at least commendable intentions'; and that the position of women demands improvement, consideration for them also. He said feelingly: 'They have to bear extraordinary burdens!' There he stopped.

The sharp intelligence fronting him understood,

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that this compassionate ejaculation was the point where she, too, must cry halt. He had, however—still under tuition, perhaps—withdrawn his voice from the pursuit of her; and so she in gratitude silenced her critical mind beneath a smooth conceit of her having led him two steps to a broader tolerance. Susceptible as she was, she did not influence him without being affected herself in other things than her vanity: his prudishness affected her. Only when her heart flamed did she disdain that real haven of refuge, with its visionary mount of superiority, offered by Society to its elect, in the habit of ignoring the sins it fosters under cloak;—not less than did the naked barbaric time, and far more to the vitiation of the soul. He fancied he was moulding her; therefore winning her. It followed, that he had the lover's desire for assurance of exclusive possession; and reflecting, that he had greatly pardoned, he grew exacting. He mentioned his objections to some of Mr. Dartrey Fenellan's ideas.

Nesta replied: 'I have this morning had two letters to make me happy.'

A provoking evasion. He would rather have seen antagonism bridle and stiffen her figure. 'Is one of them from that gentleman?'

'One is from my dear friend Louise de Seilles. She comes to me early next month.'

'The other?'

'The other is also from a friend.'

'A dear friend?'

'Not so dear. Her letter gives me happiness.'

'She writes—not from France: from . . .? you tempt me to guess.'

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

'She writes to tell me, that Mr. Dartrey Fenellan has helped her in a way to make her eternally thankful.'

'The place she writes from is . . .?'

The drag of his lips betrayed his enlightenment. He insisted on doubting. He demanded assurance.

'It matters in no degree,' she said.

Dudley 'thought himself excuseable for inquiring.'

She bowed gently.

The stings and scorpions and degrading itches of this nest of wealthy Bohemians enraged him.

'Are you—I beg to ask—are you still:—I can hardly think it—Nesta!—I surely have a claim to advise:—it cannot be with your mother's consent:—in communication, in correspondence with . . .?'

Again she bowed her head; saying: 'It is true.'

'With that person?'

He could not but look the withering disgust of the modern world in a conservative gentleman who has been lured to go with it a little way, only to be bitten. 'I decline to believe it,' he said with forcible sound.

'She is married,' was the rather shameless, exasperating answer.

'Married or not!' he cried, and murmured: 'I have borne—— These may be Mr. Dartrey Fenellan's ideas; they are not mine. I have—Something at least is due to me. Ask any lady:—there are clergymen, I know, clergymen who are for uplifting—quite right, but not associating:—to call one of them a friend! Ask any lady, any! Your mother . . .'

'I beg you will not distress my mother,' said Nesta.

'I beg to know whether this correspondence is to continue?' said Dudley.

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'All my life, if I do not feel dishonoured by it.'

CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

'You are.' He added hastily: 'Counsels of prudence:—there is not a lady living who would tell you otherwise. At all events, in public opinion, if it were known—and it would certainly be known,—a lady, wife or spinster, would suffer—would not escape the —at least shadow of defilement from relationship, any degree of intimacy with . . . hard words are wholesome in such a case:—"touch pitch," yes! My sense is coherent.'

'Quite,' said Nesta.

'And you do not agree with me?'

'I do not.'

'Do you pretend to be as able to judge as I?'

'In this instance, better.'

'Then I retire. I cannot retain my place here. You may depend upon it, the world is not wrong when it forbids young ladies to have cognizance of women leading disorderly lives.'

'Only the women, Mr. Sowerby?'

'Men, too, of course.'

'You do not exclude the men from Society.'

'Oh! one reads that kind of argument in books.'

'Oh! the worthy books, then. I would read them, if I could find them.'

'They are banned by self-respecting readers.'

'It grieves me to think differently.'

Dudley looked on this fair girl, as yet innocent girl; and contrasting her with the foulness of the subject she dared discuss, it seemed to him, that a world which did not puff at her and silence, if not extinguish, was in a state of liquefaction.

Remembering his renewed repentances in absence,

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

he said: 'I do hope you may come to see, that the views shared by your mother and me are not erroneous.'

'But do not distress her,' Nesta implored him. 'She is not well. When she has grown stronger, her kind heart will move her to receive the lady, so that she may not be deprived of the society of good women. I shall hope she will not disapprove of me. I cannot forsake a friend.'

'I beg to say good-bye,' said Dudley.

She had seen a rigidity smite him as she spoke; and so little startling was it, that she might have fancied it expected, save for her knowing herself too serious to have played at wiles to gain her ends.

He 'wished her prudent advisers.'

She thanked him. 'In a few days, Louise de Seilles will be here.'

A Frenchwoman and Papist! was the interjection of his twist of brows.

Surely I must now be free? she thought when he had covered his farewell under a salutation regretful in frostiness.

A week later, she had the embrace of her Louise, and Armandine was made happy with a piece of Parisian riband.

Winter was rapidly in passage: changes were visible everywhere; Earth and House of Commons and the South London borough exhibited them; Mrs. Burman was the sole exception. To the stupefaction of physicians, in a manner to make a sane man ask whether she was not being retained as an instrument for one of the darker purposes of Providence—and

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CHAPTER XXXIX
A Chapter in the Shadow of Mrs. Marsett

where are we standing if we ask such things?—she held on to her thread of life.

February went by. And not a word from Themison; nor from Carling, nor from the Rev. Groseman Buttermore, nor from Jarniman. That is to say, the two former accepted invitations to grand dinners; the two latter acknowledged contributions to funds in which they were interested; but they had apparently grown to consider Mrs. Burman as an establishment, one of our fixtures. On the other hand, there was nothing to be feared from her. Lakelands feared nothing: the entry into Lakelands was decreed for the middle of April. Those good creatures enclosed the poor woman and nourished her on comfortable fiction. So the death of the member for the South London borough (fifteen years younger than the veteran in maladies) was not to be called premature, and could by no possibility lead to an exposure of the private history of the candidate for his vacant seat.

CHAPTER XL

An Expiation

Nataly had fallen to be one of the solitary who have no companionship save with the wound they nurse, to chafe it rather than try at healing. So rational a mind as she had was not long in outliving mistaken impressions; she could distinguish her girl's feeling, and her aim; she could speak on the subject with Dartrey; and still her wound bled on. Louise de Seilles comforted her partly, through an exaltation

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CHAPTER XL
An Expiation

of Nesta. Mademoiselle, however, by means of a change of tone and look when Dudley Sowerby and Dartrey Fenellan were the themes, showed a too pronounced preference of the more unstable one:—or rather, the man adventurous out of the world's highways, whose image, as husband of such a daughter as hers, smote the wounded mother with a chillness. Mademoiselle's occasional thrill of fervency in an allusion to Dartrey, might have tempted a suspicious woman to indulge suppositions, accounting for the young Frenchwoman's novel tenderness to England, of which Nesta proudly, very happily, boasted. The suspicion proposed itself, and was rejected: for not even the fever of an insane body could influence Nataly's generous character, to let her moods divert and command her thoughts of persons.

Her thoughts were at this time singularly lucid upon everything about her; with the one exception of the reason why she had come to favour Dudley, and how it was she had been smitten by that woman at Brighton to see herself in her position altogether with the world's relentless, unexamining hard eyes. Bitterness added, of Mrs. Marsett: She is made an honest woman!—And there was a strain of the lower in Nataly, to reproach the girl for causing the reflection to be cast on the unwedded. Otherwise her mind was open; she was of aid to Victor in his confusion over some lost Idea he had often touched on latterly. And she was the one who sent him ahead at a trot under a light, by saying: 'You would found a new and more stable aristocracy of the contempt of luxury': when he talked of combating the Jews with a superior weapon. That being, in fact, as Colney Durance had

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pointed out to him, the weapon of self-conquest used by them 'before they fell away to flesh-pottery.' Was it his Idea? He fancied an aching at the back of his head when he speculated. But his Idea had been surpassingly luminous, alive, a creation; and this came before him with the yellow skin of a Theory, bred, born of books. Though Nataly's mention of the aristocracy of self-denying discipline struck a Lucifer in his darkness.

Nesta likewise helped: but more in what she did than in what she said: she spoke intelligently enough to make him feel a certain increase of alarm, amounting to a cursory secret acknowledgement of it, both at her dealings with Dudley and with himself. She so quietly displaced the lady visiting him at the City offices. His girl's disregard of hostile weather, and her company, her talk, delighted him: still he remonstrated, at her coming daily. She came: nor was there an instigation on the part of her mother, clearly none: her mother asked him once whether he thought she met the dreadful Brighton woman. His Fredi drove constantly to walk back beside him Westward, as he loved to do whenever it was practicable; and exceeding the flattery of his possession of the gallant daughter, her conversation charmed him to forget a disappointment caused by the defeat and entire exclusion of the lady visiting him so complimentarily for his advice on stocks, shares, mines, et cætera. The lady resisted; she was vanquished, as the shades are displaced by simple apparition of daylight.

His Fredi was like the daylight to him; she was the very daylight to his mind, whatsoever their theme of converse: for by stimulating that ready but vagrant

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CHAPTER XL
An Expiation

mind to quit the leash of the powerful senses and be æthereally excursive, she gave him a new enjoyment; which led to reflections—a sounding of Nature, almost a question to her, on the verge of a doubt. Are we, in fact, harmonious with the Great Mother when we yield to the pressure of our natures for indulgence? Is she, when translated into us, solely the imperious appetite? Here was Fredi, his little Fredi—stately girl that she had grown, and grave, too, for all her fun and her sail on wings—lifting him to pleasures not followed by clamorous, and perfectly satisfactory, yet discomposingly violent, appeals to Nature. They could be vindicated. Or could they, when they would not bear a statement of the case? He could not imagine himself stating it namelessly to his closest friend—not to Simeon Fenellan. As for speaking to Dartrey, the notion took him with shivers:—Young Dudley would have seemed a more possible confidant:—and he represented the Puritan world.—And young Dudley was getting over Fredi's infatuation for the woman she had rescued: he was beginning to fancy he saw a right enthusiasm in it;—in the abstract; if only the fair maid would drop an unseemly acquaintance. He had called at the office to say so. Victor stammered the plea for him.

'Never, dear father,' came the smooth answer: a shocking answer in contrast with the tones. Her English was as lucid as her eyes when she continued up to the shock she dealt: 'Do not encourage a good man to waste his thoughts upon me. I have chosen my mate, and I may never marry him. I do not know whether he would marry me. He has my soul. I have no shame in saying I love him. It is to love

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goodness, greatness of heart. He is a respecter of women—of all women; not only the fortunate. He is the friend of the weaker everywhere. He has been proved in fire. He does not sentimentalize over poor women, as we know who scorns people for doing:—and that is better than hardness, meaning kindly. He is not one of the unwise advocates. He measures the forces against them. He reads their breasts. He likes me. He is with me in my plans. He has not said, has not shown, he loves me. It is too high a thought for me until I hear it.'

'Has your soul!' was all that Victor could reply, while the whole conception of Lakelands quaked under the crumbling structure.

Remonstrance, argument, a word for Dudley, swelled to his lips and sank in dumbness. Her seeming intuition—if it was not a perception—of the point where submission to the moods of his nature had weakened his character, and required her defence of him, struck Victor with a serious fear of his girl; and it was the more illuminatingly damnatory for being recognized as the sentiment which no father should feel. He tried to think she ought not to be so wise of the things of the world. An effort to imagine a reproof, showed him her spirit through her eyes: in her deeds too: she had already done work on the road:—Colney Durance, Dartrey Fenellan, anything but sentimentalists either of them, strongly backing her, upholding her. Victor could no longer so naturally name her Fredi.

He spoke it hastily, under plea of some humorous tenderness, when he ventured. When Dudley, calling on him in the City to discuss the candidature for the

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CHAPTER XL
An Expiation

South London borough, named her Fredi, that he might regain a vantage of familiarity by imitating her father, it struck Victor as audacious. It jarred in his recollection, though the heir of the earldom spoke in the tone of a lover, was really at high pitch. He appeared to be appreciating her, to have suffered stings of pain; he offered himself; he made but one stipulation. Victor regretfully assured him, he feared he could do nothing. The thought of his entry into Lakelands, with Nesta Victoria refusing the foundation stone of the place, grew dim.

But he was now canvassing for the Borough, hearty at the new business as the braced swimmer on seas, which instantly he became, with an end in view to be gained.

Late one April night, expecting Nataly to have gone to bed, and Nesta to be waiting for him, he reached home, and found Nataly in her sitting-room alone. 'Nesta was tired,' she said: 'we have had a scene; she refuses Mr. Sowerby; I am sick of pressing it; he is very much in earnest, painfully; she blames him for disturbing me; she will not see the right course: —a mother reads her daughter! If my girl has not guidance!—she means rightly; she is rash.'

Nataly could not utter all that her insaneness of feeling made her think with regard to Victor's daughter —daughter also of the woman whom her hard conscience accused of inflammability. 'Here is a note from Dr. Themison, dear.'

Victor seized it, perused, and drew the big breath.

'From Themison,' he said; he coughed.

'Don't think to deceive me,' said she. 'I have not read the contents, I know them.'

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CHAPTER XL
An Expiation

'The invitation at last, for to-morrow, Sunday, four P.M. Odd, that next day at eight of the evening I shall be addressing our meeting in the Theatre. Simeon speaks. Beaves Urmsing insists on coming, Tory though he is. Those Tories are jollier fellows than—well, no wonder! There will be no surgical . . . the poor woman is very low. A couple of days at the outside. Of course, I go.'

'Hand me the note, dear.'

It had to be given up, out of the pocket.

'But,' said Victor, 'the mention of you is merely formal.'

She needed sleep: she bowed her head.

Nataly was the first at the breakfast-table in the morning, a fair Sunday morning. She was going to Mrs. John Cormyn's Church, and she asked Nesta to come with her.

She returned five minutes before the hour of lunch, having left Nesta with Mrs. John. Louise de Seilles undertook to bring Nesta home at the time she might choose. Fenellan, Mr. Pempton, Peridon and Catkin, lunched and chatted. Nataly chatted. At a quarter to three o'clock Victor's carriage was at the door. He rose; he had to keep an appointment. Nataly said to him publicly: 'I come too.' He stared and nodded. In the carriage, he said: 'I'm driving to the Gardens, for a stroll, to have a look at the beasts. Sort of relief. Poor crazy woman!—However, it's a comfort to her: so . . .!'

'I like to see them,' said Nataly. 'I shall see her. I have to do it.'

Up to the gate of the Gardens Victor was arguing to dissuade his dear soul from this very foolish,

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CHAPTER XL
An Expiation

totally unnecessary, step. Alighting, he put the matter aside, for good angels to support his counsel at the final moment.

Bears, lions, tigers, eagles, monkeys: they suggested no more than he would have had from prints; they sprang no reflection, except, that the coming hour was a matter of indifference to them. They were about him, and exercised so far a distraction. He took very kindly to an old mother monkey, relinquishing her society at sight of Nataly's heave of the bosom. Southward, across the park, the dread house rose. He began quoting Colney Durance with relish while sarcastically confuting the cynic, who found much pasture in these Gardens. Over Southward, too, he would be addressing a popular assembly tomorrow evening. Between now and then there was a ditch to jump. He put on the sympathetic face of grief. 'After all, a caged wild beast hasn't so bad a life,' he said.—To be well fed while they live, and welcome death as a release from the maladies they develop in idleness, is the condition of wealthy people: —creatures of prey? horrible thought! yet allied to his Idea, it seemed. Yes, but these good caged beasts here set them an example, in not troubling relatives and friends when they come to the gasp! Mrs. Burman's invitation loomed as monstrous—a final act of her cruelty. His skin pricked with dews. He thought of Nataly beside him, jumping the ditch with him, as a relief—if she insisted on doing it. He hoped she would not, for the sake of her composure.

It was a ditch void of bottom. But it was a mere matter of an hour, less. The state of health of the invalid could bear only a few minutes. In any case,

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we are sure that the hour will pass. Our own arrive? Certainly. 'Capital place for children!' he exclaimed. And here startlingly before him in the clusters of boys and girls, was the difference between young ones and their elders feeling quite as young: the careless youngsters have not to go and sit in the room with a virulent old woman, and express penitence and what not, and hear words of pardon, after their holiday scamper and stare at the caged beasts.

Attention to the children precipitated him upon acquaintances, hitherto cleverly shunned. He nodded them off, after the brightest of greetings.

Such anodyne as he could squeeze from the incarcerated wild creatures, was exhausted. He fell to work at Nataly's 'aristocracy of the contempt of luxury'; signifying, that we the wealthy will not exist to pamper flesh, but we live for the promotion of brotherhood:—ay, and that our England must make some great moral stand, if she is not to fall to the rear and down. Unuttered, it caught the skirts of the Idea: it evaporated when spoken. Still, this theme was almost an exorcism of Mrs. Burman. He consulted his watch. 'Thirteen minutes to four. I must be punctual,' he said. Nataly stepped faster.

Seated in the carriage, he told her he had never felt the horror of that place before. 'Put me down at the corner of the terrace, dear: I won't drive to the door.'

'I come with you, Victor,' she replied.

After entreaties and reasons intermixed, to melt her resolve, he saw she was firm: and he asked himself, whether he might not be constitutionally better adapted to persuade than to dissuade. The question

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CHAPTER XL
An Expiation

thumped. Having that house of drugs in view, he breathed more freely for the prospect of feeling his Nataly near him beneath the roof.

'You really insist, dear love?' he appealed to her: and her answer: 'It must be,' left no doubt: though he chose to say: 'Not because of standing by me?' And she said: 'For my peace, Victor.' They stepped to the pavement. The carriage was dismissed.

Seventeen houses of the terrace fronting the park led to the funereal one: and the bell was tolled in the breast of each of the couple advancing with an air of calmness to the inevitable black door.

Jarniman opened it. 'His mistress was prepared to see them.'—Not like one near death.—They were met in the hall by the Rev. Groseman Buttermore. 'You will find a welcome,' was his reassurance to them, gently delivered, on the stoop of a large person. His whispered tones were more agreeably deadening than his words.

Mr. Buttermore ushered them upstairs.

'Can she bear it?' Victor said, and heard: 'Her wish: ten minutes.'

'Soon over,' he murmured to Nataly, with a compassionate exclamation for the invalid.

They rounded the open door. They were in the drawing-room. It was furnished as in the old time, gold and white, looking new; all the same as of old, save for a division of silken hangings; and these were pale blue: the colour preferred by Victor for a bedroom. He glanced at the ceiling, to bathe in a blank space out of memory. Here she lived, here she slept, behind the hangings. There was refreshingly that little difference in the arrangement of the room.

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CHAPTER XL
An Expiation

The corner Northward was occupied by the grand piano; and Victor had an inquiry in him:—tuned? He sighed, expecting a sight to come through the hangings. Sensible that Nataly trembled, he perceived the Rev. Groseman Buttermore half across a heap of shawl-swathe on the sofa.

Mrs. Burman was present; seated. People may die seated; she had always disliked the extended posture; except for the night's rest, she used to say; imagining herself to be not inviting the bolt of sudden death, in her attitude, when seated by day:—and often at night the poor woman had to sit up for the qualms of her dyspepsia!—But I 'm bound to think humanely, be Christian, be kind, benignant, he thought, and he fetched the spirit required, to behold her face emerge from a pale blue silk veiling; as it were, the inanimate wasted led up from the mould by morning.

Mr. Buttermore signalled to them to draw near.

Wasted though it was, the face of the wide orbits for sunken eyes was distinguishable as the one once known. If the world could see it and hear, that it called itself a man's wife! She looked burnt out.

Two chairs had been set to front the sofa. Execution there! Victor thought, and he garrotted the unruly mind of a man really feeling devoutness in the presence of the shadow thrown by the dread Shade.

'Ten minutes,' Mr. Buttermore said low, after obligingly placing them on the chairs.

He went. They were alone with Mrs. Burman.

No voice came. They were unsure of being seen by the floating grey of eyes patient to gaze from their vast distance. Big drops fell from Nataly's. Victor heard the French timepiece on the mantel-shelf, where a

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CHAPTER XL
An Expiation

familiar gilt Cupid swung for the seconds: his own purchase. The time of day on the clock was wrong; the Cupid swung.

Nataly's mouth was taking breath of anguish at moments. More than a minute of the terrible length of the period of torture must have gone: two, if not three.

A quaver sounded. 'You have come.' The voice was articulate, thinner than the telephonic, trans-Atlantic by deep-sea cable.

Victor answered: 'We have.'

Another minute must have gone in the silence. And when we get to five minutes we are on the descent rapidly counting our way out of the house, into the fresh air, where we were half an hour back, among those happy beasts in the pleasant Gardens!

Mrs. Burman's eyelids shut. 'I said you would come.'

Victor started to the fire-screen. 'Your sight requires protection.'

She dozed. 'And Natalia Dreighton!' she next said.

They were certainly now on the five minutes. Now for the slide downward and outward! Nataly should never have been allowed to come.

'The white waistcoat!' struck his ears.

'Old customs with me, always!' he responded. 'The first of April, always. White is a favourite. Pale blue, too. But I fear—I hope you have not distressing nights? In my family we lay great stress on the nights we pass. My cousins, the Miss Duvidneys, go so far as to judge of the condition of health by the nightly record.'

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CHAPTER XL
An Expiation

'Your daughter was in their house.'

She knew everything!

'Very fond of my daughter—the ladies,' he remarked.

'I wish her well.'

'You are very kind.'

Mrs. Burman communed within or slept. 'Victor, Natalia, we will pray,' she said.

Her trembling hands crossed their fingers. Nataly slipped to her knees.

The two women mutely praying, pulled Victor into the devotional hush. It acted on him like the silent spell of service in a Church. He forgot his estimate of the minutes, he formed a prayer, he refused to hear the Cupid swinging, he droned a sound of sentences to deaden his ears. Ideas of eternity rolled in semblance of enormous clouds. Death was a black bird among them. The piano rang to Nataly's young voice and his. The gold and white of the chairs welcomed a youth suddenly enrolled among the wealthy by an enamoured old lady on his arm. Cupid tick-ticked. —Poor soul! poor woman! How little we mean to do harm when we do an injury! An incomprehensible world indeed at the bottom and at the top. We get on fairly at the centre. Yet it is there that we do the mischief making such a riddle of the bottom and the top. What is to be said! Prayer quiets one. Victor peered at Nataly fervently on her knees and Mrs. Burman bowed over her knotted fingers. The earnestness of both enforced an effort at a phrased prayer in him. Plungeing through a wave of the scent of Maréchale, that was a tremendous memory to haul him backward and forward, he beheld his prayer

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CHAPTER XL
An Expiation

dancing across the furniture; a diminutive thin black figure, elvish, irreverent, appallingly unlike his proper emotion; and he brought his hands just to touch, and got to the edge of his chair, with spilt knees. At once the figure vanished. By merely looking at Nataly, he passed into her prayer. A look at Mrs. Burman made it personal, his own. He heard the cluck of a horrible sob coming from him. After a repetition of his short form of prayer deeply stressed, he thanked himself with the word 'sincere,' and a queer side-thought on our human susceptibility to the influence of posture. We are such creatures.

Nataly resumed her seat. Mrs. Burman had raised her head. She said: 'We are at peace.' She presently said, with effort: 'It cannot last with me. I die in nature's way. I would bear forgiveness with me, that I may have it above. I give it here, to you, to all. My soul is cleansed, I trust. Much was to say. My strength will not. Unto God, you both!'

The Rev. Groseman Buttermore was moving on slippered step to the back of the sofa. Nataly dropped before the unseeing, scarce breathing, lady for an instant. Victor murmured an adieu, grateful for being spared the ceremonial shake of hands. He turned away, then turned back, praying for power to speak, to say that he had found his heart, was grateful, would hold her in memory. He fell on a knee before her, and forgot he had done so when he had risen. They were conducted by the rev. gentleman to the hall-door: he was not speechless. Jarniman muttered something.

That black door closed behind them.

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CHAPTER XLI

The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

To a man issuing from a mortuary where a skull had voice, London may be restorative as air of Summer Alps. It is by contrast blooming life. Observe the fellowship of the houses shoulder to shoulder; and that straight ascending smoke of the preparation for dinner; and the good policeman yonder, blessedly idle on an orderly Sabbath evening; and the families of the minor people trotting homeward from the park to tea; here and again an amiable carriage of the superimposed people driving to pay visits; they are so social, friendly, inviting to him; they strip him of the shroud, sing of the sweet old world. He cannot but be moved to the extremity of charitableness neighbouring on tears.

A stupefaction at the shock of the positive reminder, echo of the fact still shouting in his breast, that he had seen Mrs. Burman, and that the interview was over—the leaf turned and the book shut—held Victor in a silence until his gratefulness to London City was borne down by the more human burst of gratitude to the dying woman, who had spared him, as much as she could, a scene of the convulsive pathetic, and had not called on him for any utterance of penitence. That worm-like thread of voice came up to him still from sexton-depths: it sounded a larger forgiveness without the word. He felt the sorrow of it all, as he

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

told Nataly; at the same time bidding her smell 'the marvellous oxygen of the park.' He declared it to be quite equal to Lakelands.

She slightly pressed his arm for answer. Perhaps she did not feel so deeply? She was free of the horrid associations with the scent of Maréchale. At any rate, she had comported herself admirably!

Victor fancied he must have shuddered when he passed by Jarniman at the door, who was almost now seeing his mistress's ghost—would have the privilege to-morrow. He called a cab and drove to Mrs. John Cormyn's, at Nataly's request, for Nesta and mademoiselle; enjoying the Londonized odour of the cab. Nataly did not respond to his warm and continued eulogies of Mrs. Burman; she rather disappointed him. He talked of the gold and white furniture, he just alluded to the Cupid: reserving his mental comment, that the timepiece was all astray, the Cupid regular on the swing:—strange, touching, terrible, if really the silly gilt figure symbolized . . .! And we are a silly figure to be sitting in a cab imagining such things!—When Nesta and mademoiselle were opposite, he had the pleasure to see Nataly take Nesta's hand and hold it until they reached home. Those two talking together in the brief words of their deep feeling, had tones that were singularly alike: the mezzo-soprano filial to the divine maternal contralto. Those two dear ones mounted to Nataly's room.

The two dear ones showed themselves heart in heart together once more; each looked the happier for it. Dartrey was among their dinner-guests, and Nataly took him to her little blue-room before she went to bed. He did not speak of their conversation

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to Victor, but counselled him to keep her from excitement. 'My dear fellow, if you had seen her with Mrs. Burman!' Victor said, and loudly praised her coolness. She was never below a situation, he affirmed.

He followed his own counsel to humour his Nataly. She began panting at a word about Mr. Barmby's ready services. When, however, she related the state of affairs between Dartrey and Nesta, by the avowal of each of them to her, he said, embracing her: 'Your wisdom shall guide us, my love,' and almost extinguished a vexation by concealing it.

She sighed: 'If one could think, that a girl with Nesta's revolutionary ideas of the duties of women, and their powers, would be safe—or at all rightly guided by a man who is both one of the noblest and the wildest in the ideas he entertains!'

Victor sighed too. He saw the earldom, which was to dazzle the gossips, crack on the sky in a futile rocket-bouquet.

She was distressed; she moaned: 'My girl! my girl! I should wish to leave her with one who is more fixed—the old-fashioned husband. New ideas must come in politics, but in Society!—and for women! And the young having heads, are the most endangered. Nesta vows her life to it! Dartrey supports her!'

'See Colney,' said Victor. 'Odd, Colney does you good; some queer way he has. Though you don't care for his Rival Tongues,—and the last number was funny, with Semhians on the Pacific, impressively addressing a farewell to his cricket-bat, before he whirls it away to Neptune—and the blue hand of his

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

nation's protecting God observed to seize it!—Dead failure with the public, of course! However, he seems to seem wise with you. The poor old fellow gets his trouncing from the critics monthly. See Colney to-morrow, my love. Now go to sleep. We have got over the worst. I speak at my Meeting to-morrow and am a champagne-bottle of notes and points for them.'

His lost Idea drew close to him in sleep: or he thought so, when awaking to the conception of a people solidified, rich and poor, by the common pride of simple manhood. But it was not coloured, not a luminous globe: and the people were in drab, not a shining army on the march to meet the Future. It looked like a paragraph in a newspaper, upon which a Leading Article sits, dutifully arousing the fat worm of sarcastic humour under the ribs of cradled citizens, with an exposure of its excellent folly. He would not have it laughed at; still he could not admit it as more than a skirt of the robe of his Idea. For let none think him a mere City merchant, millionaire, boon-fellow, or music-loving man of the world. He had ideas to shoot across future Ages;—provide against the shrinkage of our Coal-beds; against, and for, if you like, the thickening, jumbling, threatening excess of population in these Islands, in Europe, America, all over our habitable sphere. Now that Mrs. Burman, on her way to bliss, was no longer the dungeon-cell for the man he would show himself to be, this name for successes, corporate nucleus of the enjoyments, this Victor Montgomery Radnor, intended impressing himself upon the world as a factory of ideas. Colney's insolent charge, that the English have no imagination

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—a doomed race, if it be true!—would be confuted. For our English require but the lighted leadership to come into cohesion, and step ranked, and chant harmoniously the song of their benevolent aim. And that astral head giving, as a commencement, example of the right use of riches, the nation is one, part of the riddle of the future solved.

Surely he had here the Idea? He had it so warmly, that his bath-water heated. Only the vision was wanted. On London Bridge he had *seen* it—a great thing done to the flash of brilliant results. That was after a fall.

There had been a fall also of the scheme of Lakelands.

Come to us with no superstitious whispers of indications and significations in the fall!—But there had certainly been a moral fall, fully to the level of the physical, in the maintaining of that scheme of Lakelands, now ruined by his incomprehensible Nesta—who had saved him from falling further. His bath-water chilled. He jumped out and rubbed furiously with his towels and flesh-brushes, chasing the Idea for simple warmth, to have Something inside him, to feel just that sustainment; with the cry: But no one can say I do not love my Nataly! And he tested it to prove it by his readiness to die for her: which is heroically easier than the devotedly living, and has a weight of evidence in our internal Courts for surpassing the latter tedious performance.

His Nesta had knocked Lakelands to pieces. Except for the making of money, the whole year of an erected Lakelands, notwithstanding uninterrupted successes, was a blank. Or rather we have to wish it were a

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

blank. The scheme departs: payment for the enlisted servants of it is in prospect. A black agent, not willingly enlisted, yet pointing to proofs of service, refuses payment in ordinary coin; and we tell him we owe him nothing, that he is not a man of the world, has no understanding of Nature: and still the fellow thumps and alarums at a midnight door we are astonished to find we have in our daylight house. How is it? Would other men be so sensitive to him? Victor was appeased by the assurance of his possession of an exceptionally scrupulous conscience; and he settled the debate by thinking: After all, for a man like me, battling incessantly, a kind of Vesuvius, I must have—can't be starved, must be fed—though, pah! But I'm not to be questioned like other men.—But how about an aristocracy of the contempt of distinctions?—But there is no escaping distinctions! my aristocracy despises indulgence.—And indulges?—Say, an exceptional nature!—Supposing a certain beloved woman to pronounce on the case?—She cannot: no woman can be a just judge of it.—He cried: My love of her is testified by my having Barmby handy to right her to-day, to-morrow, the very instant the clock strikes the hour of my release!

Mention of the clock swung that silly gilt figure. Victor entered into it, condemned to swing, and be a thrall. His intensity of sensation launched him on an eternity of the swinging in ridiculous nakedness to the measure of Time gone crazy. He had to correct a reproof of Mrs. Burman, as the cause of the nonsense. He ran down to breakfast, hopeing he might hear of that clock stopped, and that sickening motion with it.

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

Another letter from the Sanfredini in Milan, warmly inviting to her villa over Como, acted on him at breakfast like the waving of a banner. 'We go,' Victor said to Nataly, and flattered-up a smile about her lips —too much a resurrection smile. There was talk of the Meeting at the theatre: Simeon Fenellan had spoken there in the cause of the deceased Member, was known, and was likely to have a good reception. Fun and enthusiasm might be expected.

'And my darling will hear her husband speak to-night,' he whispered as he was departing; and did a mischief, he had to fear, for a shadowy knot crossed Nataly's forehead, she seemed paler. He sent back Nesta and mademoiselle, in consequence, at the end of the Green Park.

Their dinner-hour was early; Simeon Fenellan, Colney Durance, and Mr. Peridon—pleasing to Nataly for his faithful siege of the French fortress—were the only guests. When they rose, Nataly drew Victor aside. He came dismayed to Nesta. She ran to her mother. 'Not hear papa speak? Oh, mother, mother! Then I stay with her. But can't she come? He is going to unfold *ideas* to us. There!'

'My naughty girl is not to poke her fun at orators,' Nataly said. 'No, dearest; it would agitate me to go. I'm better here. I shall be at peace when the night is over.'

'But you will be all alone here, dear mother.'

Nataly's eyes wandered to fall on Colney. He proposed to give her his company. She declined it. Nesta ventured another entreaty, either that she might be allowed to stay or have her mother with her at the Meeting.

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

'My love,' Nataly said, 'the thought of the Meeting——' She clasped at her breast; and she murmured: 'I shall be comforted by your being with him. There is no danger there. But I shall be happy, I shall be at peace when this night is over.'

Colney persuaded her to have him for companion. Mr. Peridon, who was to have driven with Nesta and mademoiselle, won admiration by proposing to stay for an hour and play some of Mrs. Radnor's favourite pieces. Nesta and Victor overbore Nataly's objections to the lover's generosity. So Mr. Peridon was left. Nesta came hurrying back from the step of the carriage to kiss her mother again, saying: 'Just one last kiss, my own! And she's not to look troubled. I shall remember everything to tell my own mother. It will soon be over.'

Her mother nodded; but the embrace was passionate.

Nesta called her father into the passage, bidding him prohibit any delivery to her mother of news at the door. 'She is easily startled now by trifles—you have noticed?'

Victor summoned his recollections and assured her he had noticed, as he believed he had. 'The dear heart of her is fretting for the night to be over! And think!—seven days, and she is in Lakelands. A fortnight, and we have our first Concert. Durandarte! Oh, the dear heart'll be at peace when I tell her of a triumphant Meeting. Not a doubt of that, even though Colney turns the shadow of his back on us.'

'One critic the less for you!' said Nesta. Skepsey was to meet her carriage at the theatre.

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

Ten minutes later, Victor and Simeon Fenellan were proceeding thitherward on foot.

'I have my speech,' said Victor. 'You prepare the way for me, following our influential friend Dubbleson; Colewort winds up; any one else they shout for. We shall have a great evening. I suspect I shall find Themison or Jarniman when I get home. You don't believe in intimations? I've had crapy processions all day before my eyes. No wonder, after yesterday!'

'Dubbleson mustn't drawl it out too long,' said Fenellan.

'We'll drop a hint. Where's Dartrey?'

'He'll come. He's in one of his black moods: not temper. He's got a notion he killed his wife by dragging her to Africa with him. She was not only ready to go, she was glad to go. She had a bit of the heroine in her and a certainty of tripping to the deuce if she was left to herself.'

'Tell Nataly that,' said Victor. 'And tell her about Dartrey. Harp on it. Once she was all for him and our girl. But it's a woman—though the dearest! I defy any one to hit on the cause of their changes. We must make the best of things, if we're for swimming. The task for me to-night will be, to keep from rolling out all I've got in my head. And I'm not revolutionary, I'm for stability. Only I do see, that the firm stepping-place asks for a long stride to be taken. One can't get the English to take a stride—unless it's for a foot behind them:—bother old Colney! Too timid, or too scrupulous, down we go into the mire. There!—But I want to say it! I want to save the existing order. I want Christianity,

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

instead of the Mammonism we're threatened with. Great fortunes now are becoming the giants of old to stalk the land: or mediæval Barons. Dispersion of wealth, is the secret. 'Nataly's of that mind with me. A decent poverty! She's rather wearying, wants a change. I've a steam-yacht in my eye, for next month on the Mediterranean. All our set. She likes quiet. I believe in my political recipe for it.'

He thumped on a method he had for preserving aristocracy — *true* aristocracy, amid a positively democratic flood of riches.

'It appears to me, you're on the road of Priscilla Graves and Pempton,' observed Simeon. 'Strike off Priscilla's viands and friend Pempton's couple of glasses, and there's your aristocracy established; but with rather a dispersed recognition of itself.'

'Upon my word, you talk like old Colney, except for a twang of your own,' said Victor. 'Colney sours at every fresh number of that Serial. The last, with Delphica detecting the plot of Falarique, is really not so bad. The four disguised members of the Comédie Française on board the vessel from San Francisco, to declaim and prove the superior merits of the Gallic tongue, jumped me to bravo the cleverness. And Bobinikine turning to the complexion of the remainder of cupboard dumpling discovered in an emigrant's house-to-let! And Semhians—I forget what: and Mytharete's forefinger over the bridge of his nose, like a pensive vulture on the skull of a desert camel! But, I complain, there's nothing to make the English love the author; and it's wasted, he's basted, and the book'll have no sale. I hate satire.'

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

'Rough soap for a thin skin, Victor. Does it hurt our people much?'

'Not a bit; doesn't touch them. But I want my friends to succeed!'

Their coming upon Westminster Bridge changed the theme. Victor wished the Houses of Parliament to catch the beams of sunset. He deferred to the suggestion, that the Hospital's doing so seemed appropriate.

'I'm always pleased to find a decent reason for what *is*,' he said. Then he queried: 'But *what* is, if we look at it, and while we look, Simeon? She may be going—or she's gone already, poor woman! I shall have that scene of yesterday everlastingly before my eyes, like a drop-curtain. Only, you know, Simeon, they don't feel the end, as we in health imagine. Colney would say, we have the spasms and they the peace. I've a mind to send up to Regent's Park with inquiries. It would look respectful. God forgive me!—the poor woman perverts me at every turn. Though I will say, a certain horror of death I had—she whisked me out of it yesterday. I don't feel it any longer. What are you jerking at?'

'Only to remark, that if the thing's done for us, we haven't it so much on our sensations.'

'More, if we're sympathetic. But that compels us to be philosophic—or who could live! Poor woman!'

'Waft her gently, Victor!'

'Tush! Now for the South side of the Bridges; and I tell you, Simeon, what I can't mention to-night: I mean to enliven these poor dear people on their forsaken South of the City. I've my scheme. Elected

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

or not, I shall hardly be accused of bribery when I put down my first instalment.'

Fenellan went to work with that remark in his brain for the speech he was to deliver. He could not but reflect on the genial man's willingness and capacity to do deeds of benevolence, constantly thwarted by the position into which he had plunged himself.

They were received at the verge of the crowd outside the theatre-doors by Skepsey, who wriggled, tore and clove a way for them, where all were obedient, but the numbers lumped and clogged. When finally they reached the stage, they spied at Nesta's box, during the thunder of the rounds of applause, after shaking hands with Mr. Dubbleson, Sir Abraham Quatley, Dudley Sowerby, and others; and with Beaves Urmsing—a politician 'never of the opposite party to a deuce of a funny fellow!—go anywhere to hear him,' he vowed.

'Miss Radnor and Mademoiselle de Seilles arrived quite safely,' said Dudley, feasting on the box which contained them and no Dartrey Fenellan in it.

Nesta was wondering at Dartrey's absence. Not before Mr. Dubbleson, the chairman, the 'gentleman of local influence,' had animated the drowsed wits and respiratory organs of a packed audience by yielding place to Simeon, did Dartrey appear. Simeon's name was shouted, in proof of the happy explosion of his first anecdote, as Dartrey took seat behind Nesta. 'Half an hour with the dear mother,' he said.

Nesta's eyes thanked him. She pressed the hand of a demure young woman sitting close behind Louise de Seilles. 'You know Matilda Pridden.'

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

Dartrey held his hand out. 'Has she forgiven me?'

Matilda bowed gravely, enfolding her affirmative in an outline of the no need for it, with perfect good breeding. Dartrey was moved to think Skepsey's choice of a woman to worship did him honour. He glanced at Louise. Her manner toward Matilda Pridden showed her sisterly with Nesta. He said: 'I left Mr. Peridon playing.—A little anxiety to hear that the great speech of the evening is done; it's nothing else. I'll run to her as soon as it's over.'

'Oh, good of you! And kind of Mr. Peridon!' She turned to Louise, who smiled at the simple art of the exclamation, assenting.

Victor below, on the stage platform, indicated the waving of a hand to them and his delight at Simeon's ringing points: which were, to Dartrey's mind, vacuously clever and crafty. Dartrey despised effects of oratory, save when soldiers had to be hurled on a mark—or citizens nerved to stand for their country.

Nesta dived into her father's brilliancy of appreciation, a trifle pained by Dartrey's aristocratic air when he surveyed the herd of heads agape and another cheer rang round. He smiled with her, to be with her, at a hit here and there; he would not pretend an approval of this manner of winning electors to consider the country's interests and their own. One fellow in the crowded pit, affecting a familiarity with Simeon, that permitted the taking of liberties with the orator's Christian name, mildly amused him. He had no objection to hear 'Simmy' shouted, as Louise de Seilles observed. She was of his mind, in regard to the rough machinery of Freedom.

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

Skepsey entered the box.

'We shall soon be serious, Miss Nesta,' he said, after a look at Matilda Pridden.

There was prolonged roaring—on the cheerful side.

'And another word about security that your candidate will keep his promises,' continued Simeon: 'You have his word, my friends!' And he told the story of the old Governor of Goa, who wanted money and summoned the usurers, and they wanted security; whereupon he laid his Hidalgo hand on a cataract of Kronos-beard across his breast, and pulled forth three white hairs, and presented them: 'And as honourably to the usurious Jews as to the noble gentleman himself, that security was accepted!'

Emerging from hearty clamours, the illustrative orator fell upon the question of political specifics:—Mr. Victor Radnor trusted to English good sense too profoundly to be offering them positive cures, as they would hear the enemy say he did. Yet a bit of a cure may be offered, if we're not for pushing it too far, in pursuit of the science of specifics, in the style of the foreign physician, probably Spanish, who had no practice, and wished for leisure to let him prosecute his anatomical and other investigations to discover his grand medical nostrum. So to get him fees meanwhile he advertised a cure for dyspepsia—the resource of starving doctors. And sure enough his patient came, showing the grand fat fellow we may be when we carry more of the deciduously mortal than of the scraggy vital upon our persons. Any one at a glance would have prescribed water-cresses to him: water-cresses exclusively to eat for a fortnight. And that the good physician did. Away

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

went his patient, returning at the end of a fortnight, lean, and with the appetite of a Toledo blade for succulent slices. He vowed he was the man. Our estimable doctor eyed him, tapped at him, pinched his tender parts; and making him swear he was really the man, and had eaten nothing whatever but unadulterated water-cresses in the interval, seized on him in an ecstasy by the collar of his coat, pushed him into the surgery, knocked him over, killed him, cut him up, and enjoyed the felicity of exposing to view the very healthiest patient ever seen under dissecting hand, by favour of the fortunate discovery of the specific for him. All to further science!—to which, in spite of the petitions of all the scientific bodies of the civilized world, he fell a martyr on the scaffold, poor gentleman! But we know politics to be no such empirical science.

Simeon ingeniously interwove his analogy. He brought it home to Beaves Urmsing, whose laugh drove any tone of apology out of it. Yet the orator was asked: 'Do you take politics for a joke, Simmy?'

He countered his questioner: 'Just to liberate you from your moribund state, my friend.' And he told the story of the wrecked sailor, found lying on the sands, flung up from the foundered ship of a Salvation captain; and how, that nothing could waken him, and there he lay fit for interment; until presently a something of a voice grew down into his ears; and it was his old chum Polly, whom he had tied to a board to give her a last chance in the surges; and Polly shaking the wet from her feathers, and shouting: '*Polly tho dram dry!*'—which struck on the nob of Jack's memory, to revive all the liquorly tricks of the

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

cabin under Salvationism, and he began heaving, and at last he shook in a lazy way, and then from sputter to sputter got his laugh loose; and he sat up, and cried: 'That did it! Now to business!' for he was hungry. 'And when I catch the ring of this world's laugh from you, my friend . . .!' Simeon's application of the story was drowned.

After the outburst, they heard his friend again interruptingly: 'You keep that tongue of yours from wagging, as it did when you got round the old widow woman for her money, Simmy!'

Victor leaned forward. Simeon towered. He bellowed: 'And you keep that tongue of yours from committing incest on a lie!'

It was like a lightning-flash in the theatre. The man went under. Simeon flowed. Conscience reproached him with the little he had done for Victor, and he had now his congenial opportunity.

Up in the box, the powers of the orator were not so cordially esteemed. To Matilda Pridden, his tales were barely decently the flesh and the devil smothering a holy occasion to penetrate and exhort. Dartrey sat rigid, as with the checked impatience for a leap. Nesta looked at Louise when some one was perceived on the stage bending to her father. It was Mr. Peridon; he never once raised his face. Apparently he was not intelligible or audible: but the next moment Victor sprang erect. Dartrey quitted the box. Nesta beheld her father uttering hurried words to right and left. He passed from sight, Mr. Peridon with him; and Dartrey did not return.

Nesta felt her father's absence as light gone: his eyes rayed light. Besides she had the anticipation of

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

a speech from him, that would win Matilda Pridden. She fancied Simeon Fenellan to be rather under the spell of the hilarity he roused. A gentleman behind him spoke in his ear; and Simeon, instead of ceasing, resumed his flow. Matilda Pridden's gaze on him and the people was painful to behold: Nesta saw her mind. She set herself to study a popular assembly. It could be serious to the call of better leadership, she believed. Her father had been telling her of late of a faith he had in the English, that they (or so her intelligence translated his remarks) had power to rise to spiritual ascendency, and be once more the Islanders heading the world of a new epoch abjuring materialism:—some such idea; very quickening to her, as it would be to this earnest young woman worshipped by Skepsey. Her father's absence and the continued shouts of laughter, the insatiable thirst for fun, darkened her in her desire to have the soul of the good working sister refreshed. They had talked together; not much: enough for each to see at either's breast the wells from the founts of life.

The box-door opened, Dartrey came in. He took her hand. She stood-up to his look. He said to Matilda Pridden: 'Come with us; she will need you.'

'Speak it,' said Nesta.

He said to the other: 'She has courage.'

'I could trust to her,' Matilda Pridden replied.

Nesta read his eyes. 'Mother?'

His answer was in the pressure.

'Ill?'

'No longer.'

'Oh! Dartrey.'

Matilda Pridden caught her fast.

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CHAPTER XLI
The Night of the Great Undelivered Speech

'I can walk, dear,' Nesta said.

Dartrey mentioned her father.

She understood: 'I am thinking of him.'

The words of her mother: 'At peace when the night is over,' rang. Along the gassy passages of the back of the theatre, the sound coming from an applausive audience was as much a thunder as rage would have been. It was as void of human meaning as a sea.

CHAPTER XLII

The Last

In the still dark hour of that April morning, the Rev. Septimus Barmby was roused by Mr. Peridon, with a scribbled message from Victor, which he deciphered by candlelight held close to the sheet of paper, between short inquiries and communications, losing more and more the sense of it as his intelligence became aware of what dread blow had befallen the stricken man. He was bidden come to fulfil his promise instantly. He remembered the bearing of the promise. Mr. Peridon's hurried explanatory narrative made the request terrific, out of tragically lamentable. A semblance of obedience had to be put on, and the act of dressing aided it. Mr. Barmby prayed at heart for guidance further.

The two gentlemen drove Westward, speaking little; they had the dry sob in the throat.

'Miss Radnor?' Mr. Barmby asked.

'She is shattered; she holds up; she would not break down.'

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'I can conceive her to possess high courage.'

'She has her friend Mademoiselle de Seilles.'

Mr. Barmby remained humbly silent. Affectionate deep regrets moved him to say: 'A loss irreparable. We have but one voice of sorrow. And how sudden! The dear lady had no suffering, I trust.'

'She fell into the arms of Mr. Durance. She died in his arms. She was unconscious, he says. I left her straining for breath. She said "Victor"; she tried to smile:—I understood I was not to alarm him.'

'And he too late!'

'He was too late, by some minutes.'

'At least I may comfort. Miss Radnor must be a blessing to him.'

'They cannot meet. Her presence excites him.'

That radiant home of all hospitality seemed opening on from darker chambers to the deadly dark. The immorality in the moral situation could not be forgotten by one who was professionally a moralist. But an incorruptible beauty in the woman's character claimed to plead for her memory. Even the rigorous in defence of righteous laws are softened by a sinner's death to hear excuses, and may own a relationship, haply perceive the faint nimbus of the saint. Death among us proves us to be still not so far from the Nature saying at every avenue to the mind: *Earth makes all sweet.*

Mr. Durance had prophesied a wailful end ever to the carol of Optimists! Yet it is not the black view which is the right view. There is one between: the path adopted by Septimus Barmby:—if he could but induce his brethren to enter on it! The dreadful

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CHAPTER XLII The Last

teaching of circumstances might help to the persuading of a fair young woman, under his direction . . . having her hand disengaged.—Mr. Barmby startled himself in the dream of his uninterred passion for the maiden: he chased it, seized it, hurled it hence, as a present sacrilege:—constantly, and at the pitch of our highest devotion to serve, are we assailed by the tempter! Is it, that the love of woman is our weakness? For if so, then would a celibate clergy have grant of immunity. But, alas, it is not so with them! We have to deplore the hearing of reports too credible. Again we are pushed to contemplate woman as the mysterious obstruction to the perfect purity of soul. Nor is there a refuge in asceticism. No more devilish nourisher of pride do we find than in pain voluntarily embraced. And strangely, at the time when our hearts are pledged to thoughts upon others, they are led by woman to glance revolving upon ourself, our vile self! Mr. Barmby clutched it by the neck.

Light now, as of a strong memory of day along the street, assisted him to forget himself at the sight of the inanimate houses of this London, all revealed in a quietness not less immobile than tombstones of an unending cemetery, with its last ghost laid. Did men but know it!—The habitual necessity to amass matter for the weekly sermon, set him noting his meditative exclamations, the noble army of platitudes under haloes, of good use to men: justifiably turned over in his mind for their good. He had to think, that this act of the justifying of the act reproached him with a lack of due emotion, in sympathy with agonized friends truly dear. Drawing near the hospitable house, his official and a cordial emotion united, as we see

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sorrowful crape-wreathed countenances. His heart struck heavily when the house was visible.

Could it be the very house? The look of it belied the tale inside. But that threw a ghostliness on the look.

Some one was pacing up and down. They greeted Dudley Sowerby. His ability to speak was tasked. They gathered, that mademoiselle and 'a Miss Pridden' were sitting with Nesta, and that their service in a crisis had been precious. At such times, one of them reflected, woman has indeed her place: when life's battle waxes red. Her soul must be capable of mounting to the level of the man's, then? It is a lesson!

Dudley said he was waiting for Dr. Themison to come forth. He could not tear himself from sight of the house.

The door opened to Dr. Themison departing, Colney Durance and Simeon Fenellan bare-headed. Colney showed a face with stains of the lashing of tears.

Dr. Themison gave his final counsels. 'Her father must not see her. For him, it *may* have to be a specialist. We will hope the best. Mr. Dartrey Fenellan stays beside him:—good. As to the ceremony he calls for, a form of it might soothe:—any soothing possible! No music. I will return in a few hours.'

He went on foot.

Mr. Barmby begged advice from Colney and Simeon concerning the message he had received—the ceremony requiring his official presidency. Neither of them replied. They breathed the morning air, they gave out long-drawn sighs of relief, looking on the trees of the park.

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CHAPTER XLII The Last

A man came along the pavement, working slow legs hurriedly. Simeon ran down to him.

'Humour, as much as you can,' Colney said to Mr. Barmby. 'Let him imagine.'

'Miss Radnor?'

'Not to speak of her!'

'The daughter he so loves?'

Mr. Barmby's tender inquisitiveness was unanswered. Were they inducing him to mollify a madman? But was it possible to associate the idea of madness with Mr. Radnor?

Simeon ran back. 'Jarniman,' he remarked. 'It's over!'

'Now!' Colney's shoulders expressed the comment. 'Well, now, Mr. Barmby, you can do the part desired. Come in. It's morning!' He stared at the sky.

All except Dudley passed in.

Mr. Barmby wanted more advice, his dilemma being acute. It was moderated, though not more than moderated, when he was informed of the death of Mrs. Burman Radnor; an event that occurred, according to Jarniman's report, forty-five minutes after Skepsey had a second time called for information of it at the house in Regent's Park: five hours and a half, as Colney made his calculation, after the death of Nataly. He was urged by some spur of senseless irony to verify the calculation and correct it in the minutes.

Dudley crossed the road. No sign of the awful interior was on any of the windows of the house either to deepen awe or relieve. They were blank as eyeballs of the mindless. He shivered. Death is our common cloak; but Calamity individualizes, to set

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the unwounded speculating whether indeed a stricken man, who has become the cause of woeful trouble, may not be pointing a moral. Pacing on the Park side of the house, he saw Skepsey drive up and leap out with a gentleman, Mr. Radnor's lawyer. Could it be, that there was no Will written? Could a Will be executed now? The moral was more forcibly suggested. Dudley beheld this Mr. Victor Radnor successful up all the main steps, persuasive, popular, brightest of the elect of Fortune, felled to the ground within an hour, he and all his house! And if at once to pass beneath the ground, the blow would have seemed merciful for him. Or if, instead of chattering a mixture of the rational and the monstrous, he had been heard to rave like the utterly distraught. Recollection of some of the things he shouted, was an anguish:—A notion came into the poor man, that he was the dead one of the two, and he cried out: 'Cremation? No, Colney 's right, it robs us of our last laugh. I lie as I fall.' He 'had a confession for his Nataly, for her only, for no one else.' He had 'an Idea.' His begging of Dudley to listen without any punctilio (putting a vulgar oath before it), was the sole piece of unreasonableness in the explanation of the idea: and that was not much wilder than the stuff Dudley had read from reports of Radical speeches. He told Dudley he thought him too young to be 'best man to a widower about to be married,' and that Barmby was 'coming all haste to do the business, because of no time to spare.'

Dudley knew but the half, and he did not envy Dartrey Fenellan his task of watching over the wreck of a splendid intelligence, humouring and restraining.

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CHAPTER XLII
The Last

According to the rumours, Mr. Radnor had not shown the symptoms before the appearance of his daughter. For awhile he hung, and then fell, like an icicle. Nesta came with a cry for her father. He rose; Dartrey was by. Hugged fast in iron muscles, the unhappy creature raved of his being a caged lion. These things Dudley had heard in the house.

There are scenes of life proper to the grave-cloth.

Nataly's dead body was her advocate with her family, with friends, with the world. Victor had more need of a covering shroud to keep calamity respected. Earth makes all sweet: and we, when the privilege is granted us, do well to treat the terribly stricken as if they had entered to the bosom of earth.

That night's infinite sadness was concentrated upon Nesta. She had need of her strength of mind and body.

The night went past as a year. The year followed it as a refreshing night. Slowly lifting her from our abysses, it was a good angel to the girl. Permission could not be given for her to see her father. She had a home in the modest home of Louise de Seilles on the borders of Dauphiné; and with French hearts at their best in winningness around her, she learned again, as an art, the natural act of breathing calmly; she had by degrees a longing for the snow-heights. When her imagination could perch on them with love and pride, she began to recover the throb for a part in human action. It set her nature flowing to the mate she had chosen, who was her counsellor, her supporter, and her sword. She had awakened to new life, not to sink back upon a breast of love, though thoughts of the lover were as blows upon strung musical chords at her bosom. Her union with

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CHAPTER XLII The Last

Dartrey was for the having an ally and the being an ally, in resolute vision of strife ahead, through the veiled dreams that bear the blush. This was behind a maidenly demureness. Are not young women hypocrites? Who shall fathom their guile! A girl with a pretty smile, a gentle manner, a liking for wild flowers up on the rocks; and graceful with resemblances to the swelling proportions of garden-fruits approved in young women by the connoisseur eye of man; distinctly designed to embrace the state of marriage, that she might (a girl of singularly lucid and receptive eyes) the better give battle to men touching matters which they howl at an eccentric matron for naming. So it was. And the yielding of her hand to Dartrey, would have appeared at that period of her revival, as among the baser compliances of the fleshly, if she had not seen in him, whom she owned for leader, her fellow soldier, warrior friend, hero, of her own heart's mould, but a greater.

She was on Como, at the villa of the Signora Giulia Sanfredini, when Dudley's letter reached her, with the supplicating offer of the share of his earldom. An English home meanwhile was proposed to her at the house of his mother the Countess. He knew that he did not write to a brilliant heiress. The generosity she had always felt that he possessed, he thus proved in figures. They are convincing and not melting. But she was moved to tears by his goodness in visiting her father, as well as by the hopeful news he sent. He wrote delicately, withholding the title of her father's place of abode. There were expectations of her father's perfect recovery; the signs were auspicious; he appeared to be restored to the 'likeness

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CHAPTER XLII The Last

to himself' in the instances Dudley furnished:—his appointment with him for the flute-duet next day; and particularly his enthusiastic satisfaction with the largeness and easy excellent service of the residence 'in which he so happily found himself established.' He held it to be, 'on the whole, superior to Lakelands.' The smile and the tear rolled together in Nesta reading these words. And her father spoke repeatedly of longing to embrace his Fredi, of the joy her last letter had given him, of his intention to send an immediate answer: and he showed Dudley a pile of manuscript ready for the post. He talked of public affairs, was humorous over any extravagance or eccentricity in the views he took; notably when he alluded to his envy of little Skepsey. He said he really did envy; and his daughter believed it and saw fair prospects in it.

Her grateful reply to the young earl conveyed all that was perforce ungentle, in the signature of the name of Nesta Victoria Fenellan:—a name he was to hear cited among the cushioned conservatives, and plead for as he best could under a pressure of disapprobation, and compelled esteem, and regrets.

The day following the report of her father's wish to see her, she and her husband started for England. On that day, Victor breathed his last. Dudley had seen the not hopeful but an ominous illumination of the stricken man; for whom came the peace his Nataly had in earth. Often did Nesta conjure up to vision the palpitating form of the beloved mother with her hand at her mortal wound in secret through long years of the wearing of the mask to keep her mate inspirited. Her gathered knowledge of things and her ruthless

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penetrativeness made it sometimes hard for her to be tolerant of a world, whose tolerance of the infinitely evil stamped blotches on its face and shrieked in stains across the skin beneath its gallant garb. That was only when she thought of it as the world condemning her mother. She had a husband able and ready, in return for corrections of his demon temper, to trim an ardent young woman's fanatical overflow of the sisterly sentiments; scholarly friends, too, for such restrainings from excess as the mind obtains in a lamp of History exhibiting man's original sprouts to growth and fitful continuation of them. Her first experience of the grief that is in pleasure, for those who have passed a season, was when the old Concert-set assembled round her. When she heard from the mouth of a living woman, that she had saved her from going under the world's waggon-wheels, and taught her to know what is actually meant by the good living of a shapely life, Nesta had the taste of a harvest happiness richer than her recollection of the bride's, though never was bride in fuller flower to her lord than she who brought the dower of an equal valiancy to Dartrey Fenellan. You are aware of the reasons, the many, why a courageous young woman requires of high heaven, far more than the commendably timid, a doughty husband. She had him; otherwise would that puzzled old world, which beheld her step out of the ranks to challenge it, and could not blast her personal reputation, have commissioned a paw to maul her character, perhaps instructing the gossips to murmur of her parentage. Nesta Victoria Fenellan had the husband who would have the world respectful to any brave woman. This one was his wife.

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CHAPTER XLII
The Last

Daniel Skepsey rejoices in service to his new master, owing to the scientific opinion he can at any moment of the day apply for, as to the military defences of the country; instead of our attempting to arrest the enemy by vociferations of persistent prayer: —the sole point of difference between him and his Matilda; and it might have been fatal but that Nesta's intervention was persuasive. The two members of the Army first in the field to enrol and give rank according to the merits of either, to both sexes, were made one. Colney Durance (practically cynical when not fancifully, men said) stood by Skepsey at the altar. His published exercises in Satire produce a flush of the article in the Reviews of his books. Meat and wine in turn fence the Hymen beckoning Priscilla and Mr. Pempton. The forms of Religion more than the Channel's division of races keep Louise de Seilles and Mr. Peridon asunder: and in the uniting of them Colney is interested, because it would have so pleased the woman of the loyal heart no longer beating. He let Victor's end be his expiation and did not phrase blame of him. He considered the shallowness of the abstract Optimist exposed enough in Victor's history. He was reconciled to it when, looking on their child, he discerned, that for a cancelling of the errors chargeable to them, the father and mother had kept faith with Nature.

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